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October 15th

Adventure

Published Twice
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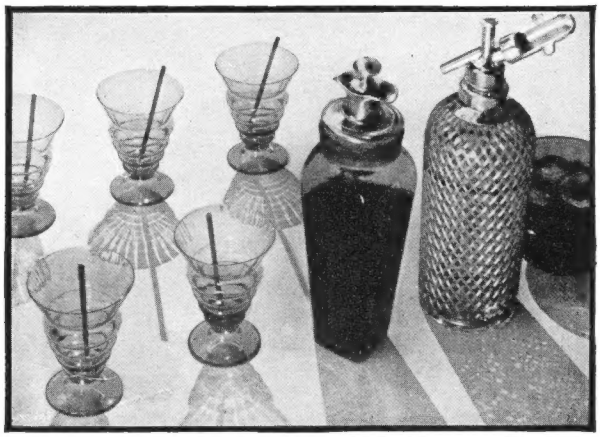

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Adventure

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A Novelette of Colonel O'Brien and the Barbary Pirates

AT THE opening of the year 1693 a naked, filthy slave was laboring with fifty thousand others, building the walls of Meknez, when he saw a group of men passing below. As a result of this glimpse came the temptation and endurance of one man, the resurrection of another, and the death of many.

The staring slave had been pounding down the mastic of which the huge walls were built. Now he dropped his pounder and rushed to the side of the Spanish renegade who, whip in hand, directed this particular gang.

"Look!" he cried, pointing at the group, still visible. "Do you see that tall man in front? Tell me who he is, and we may both profit by it."

So wild, so distraught was the slave's look, that the renegade peered to see who had gone by below.

"That is an ambassador lately arrived from Ireland, they say, or the Irish king. He stands high in favor with Mulai Ismail, and goes to the palace every day. You know him?"

"Aye." The slave glanced around. "I'll write a letter tonight. You get the ear of Abraham Maimoran, the royal treasurer, and if this ambassador gets the letter, there'll be a hundred gold pieces for you and Maimoran to share."

"Eh? You are in earnest?"

A flame danced in the blue eyes of the gaunt, scarred slave.

"That I am! If we—"

The renegade overseer was absorbed in what the slave proposed; the slave himself was deaf to all around. Neither of them caught the muttered warnings from the other slaves, or saw the approaching figures—until too late.

Half a dozen of the black palace guards, fusils in hand, matches alight, came up the ramp. Ahead of them ran a spare black figure clad in yellow robes, which were spotted with fresh blood. Wild fury twisted his aquiline features. Just as the two caught sight of him, he lifted his lance and drove it forward; it transfixed the renegade through the body. As the man fell, the emperor uttered a wild cry. For this man, black of features with a white spot by his nostril, was Mulai Ismail, Lord of Morocco.

"Bring the Alcaide Melek here!" he commanded, and then turned upon a group of Arabs and renegades who followed his bodyguard—the overseers of this portion of the work. "Dogs!" he cried out. "So this is how you work when you think I am not watching, is it?

The STRONG HAND ABOVE

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

By Allah, you shall learn from me—"

He whipped out his gold hilted scimitar, whose diamonds and emeralds flashed in the white sunlight, and sprang upon the group. In a frothing rage he cut down man after man. None dared to resist, nor indeed could any man in Morocco stand before this spare, lean warrior. When five of the overseers lay dead, he whirled about and faced the panting Alcaide—one of the highest of the court officials, who had in charge all this section of the work.

"Give him the bastinado!" he ordered. "And after it, five hundred lashes, that he may teach his underlings how to work."

He laughed cruelly and glanced around, meeting the eye of the gaunt slave. Now, Ismail was not the homicidal maniac he appeared, by a good deal. He survived by making men fear him, but also by a shrewd craft which backed up his physical prowess. Every slave in Morocco was his personal property—and so was every other person and all personal property his. He rarely harmed his Christian slaves, for they were his expert workmen.

"So, infidel dog, you dare to stand there idle?" he said softly. To the utter amazement of all who watched, the slave did not fall upon his knees, but gave a wild laugh.

"Aye, beloved of Allah!" he rejoined. "How better to draw the attention of Ismail than to stand idle?"

"So you desire the attention of Ismail?" The emperor smiled thinly.

"Aye. To tell him that I have a brother who just passed this way," said the slave boldly. "His name is O'Brien, and he is ambassador to your court from our country; I am his brother, whom he has long thought dead. Give me grace and pardon, beloved of Allah!"

Bold as was this demand, it was the only possible way of salvation. Ismail, who feared nothing on earth himself, hated men who cringed, but listened to those who bearded him. In all his reign of nearly sixty years, he was only known to spare one man; but this man met him with a laugh and a shrewd trick, and Ismail admired him. Now he eyed the slave keenly, and wiped a splotch of blood from his long forked beard.

"Confess that Mohammed is the Prophet of God, and you are free," he said.

The slave laughed and pointed to his white scars.

"These scars and twelve years of slavery are the answer, son of Idris!"

Ismail eyed him and smiled to himself, then beckoned one of his guards. The slave was led away—to be impaled, as all men thought. Ismail beckoned another of his Sudanese, and pointed to the bodies of those whom he had slain.

"Go to the homes of these men. Say that it was the will of Allah that they should die, and bring to me their slaves and possessions and all that they owned."

The guard departed, and there was nothing strange in this errand, since one of Ismail's black guards had more power than all the Arabs in Morocco, and who touched him died terribly. As for the bodies of the dead, they were pitched into the molds of the rising walls and pounded down into mastic, to lie with thousands of other such.

For in this manner were the walls of Meknez built.

COLONEL JAMES O'BRIEN, late of the Jacobite service, the French and Swedish service, and the high seas generally, said nothing of the note that had been thrust into his hand as he entered the palace. Staggered as he was by the news, he thrust it resolutely from his mind. His ability to deal with one thing at a time was a factor in his success.

With his buccaneering lieutenant, Vicomte de St. Rocher, he had invented an embassy from Ireland and had come to Meknez—only to find that these Arabs were not to be fooled. A chance meeting with Mulai Ismail let O'Brien save himself by proposing that Salé be opened to buccaneers. Further, it placed him in the emperor's favor, even to an embarrassing extent, as he found on reaching Meknez. Ismail had a passion for converting ambassadors to Islam.

St. Rocher was down with fever, a gaunt, pain racked shadow of himself. Each morning O'Brien was ordered to the palace, to remain until noon in the company of Ismail. And each morning, as he came, fresh amazement surged upon him at this place, this incredible place of which Ismail was the builder and architect. To any sane man, indeed, it was a city not only of blood uncounted but of wonders hard for the European brain to grasp.

Now, as he felt the note rustle in his pocket, O'Brien swaggered on past the two pashas holding court at the gate—the black pasha who judged the black folk, the white pasha whose tribunal was for the Arabs. The guards saluted him and the big Sudanese of the bodyguard who was his escort, and he went on.

Here, for miles across the hills, were enormous crenelated walls; his city done, Ismail was building full fifty palaces for his chief sons, each palace with its own grounds and enclosures. The work cost him nothing. He had close to thirty thousand Christian slaves, as many criminals of his own people, and he drew savagely upon all the Moroccan towns and tribes for enforced labor and for building materials.

The note burned in O'Brien's pocket. St. Rocher must know nothing of it; that hardy, generous comrade was in no shape for work—and this meant more than work. Thus resolved, O'Brien turned a corner of the walls and came upon Ismail sitting in an archway, beside him a dish of dried peas; the emperor was a frugal liver. About were his retinue, and before him, out in the sun, were drawn up some seventy Berbers, who took turns in haranguing Ismail.

O'Brien, saluting the emperor, turned into the shade beside a Dutch renegade who was waiting to have some building plans approved, and spoke to him softly.

"What is going on?"

The renegade laughed.

"These are a deputation of chiefs from the Zgoul Berbers, who have never accepted the true religion. They have come to argue religion with Ismail, and have been presenting their arguments all morning. Our lord wears a green vest, therefore he is in merciful mood—ah!"

Ismail cut short the harangue and uttered a few words. The seventy Berbers, lordly hillmen, rose. The Dutchman's eyes glittered.

"He says their arguments are good, but he has a better one. Watch!"

A trumpet blew. Into the courtyard marched a company of the black guards, surrounding the Berbers. Next instant the curved swords were at work. Five minutes later, the seventy heads were being piled before Ismail, who ordered them placed at the city gates, and the bodies sent to feed his lions and leopards and wolves, kept in the gardens. This detail finished, he glanced around and beckoned O'Brien.

The latter stood before him, an interpreter at his elbow.

"Infidel," said the emperor, stroking his forked beard and meeting the bright blue eyes of O'Brien with a slight smile, "your master King James is a fugitive at the court of the French king, who is my friend and brother. He is a fool, this king of yours, who knows not how to rule; nonetheless, I love him, because his brother Charles was the first to call me emperor and make treaties with me. Therefore I am resolved to set him back upon his throne."

Amazed as he was, O'Brien merely bowed.

"You have just seen," continued Ismail, "how the will of Allah works with those who refuse the light of the true faith. Now, you are a man whom I like. I desire that you shall become a convert to Islam. When this is done, I will make you commander of my bodyguard, the first man in El Magrib. You accept?"

Those who heard stared in astonishment. So did O'Brien, knowing what this meant. The Sudanese, whose numbers ranged from fifty thousand to three times that number, had a separate city outside the walls. It was the blacks who garrisoned the seventy forts which held all the country in subjection. Their children were brought up with special training to follow in their profession. Pitilessly drilled, they were Praetorians whom all men feared bitterly, save Ismail alone. They feared him, to the very marrow.

"Son of Idris," said O'Brien easily, "you are a *taleb,* a doctor of the law. You preach in the mosques. You know how Mohammed, may his name be blessed, ordained that no infidel be brought to the faith except of his own will, voluntarily."

"That is true," said Ismail, with a gratified nod. "The will of men may be prevailed upon, however."

"That depends upon the man," said O'Brien, and a smile lightened the grave, hard lines of his features.

"Accept," said Ismail, "and whatever you ask of me, that I will grant."

The note burned again in O'Brien's pocket, but he only shook his head.

"There is nothing I would have of you, son of Idris."

Ismail, knowing that O'Brien had received and read the note, regarded him curiously, then made a gesture of dismissal.

"When you change your mind, infidel, come to me, wherever I may be," he said. "Now go your ways, for I have sent gifts to your house, and my own physician to visit your friend. Come to me this afternoon at the stables."

O'Brien bowed deeply to him and returned from the palace to the city as he had come, the Sudanese at his side.

He saw the great gangs of slaves at work, and upon the hillside opposite rose the smoke of the lime kilns, where more than a few of them were burned alive. He saw the clouds of dust arising down the valley, where caravans of slaves and plunder, of building materials, came pouring in endlessly from every quarter of Morocco. He was saluted by a few renegades, and met glares from others; rich men, these, for the entire province of the Dra with its farms and towns had been made over to the English and Spaniards and French and Dutch who became converts; and these handled the artillery trains of Ismail.

So presently he came to the house, close by the convent of Spanish friars, which had been given his embassy, so called, as a dwelling place. The black remained at the door, and O'Brien went in to find the emperor's physician, Abd

el Melek, treating St. Rocher. A dozen slaves had brought gifts, but O'Brien ignored these and went to his friend's bedside, when he had greeted the Arab healer.

"How goes it?"

"Well enough, Jack," said St. Rocher. "But this cursed weakness! If I could but see the ocean and sniff the salt sea wind, it would put me on my feet again."

O'Brien turned to the physician, who spoke excellent Spanish.

"Abd el Melek," he said frankly, "my friend must get back to the coast. This matter lies in your hands. Arrange it with your master. Have him sent at once with an escort to Salé, and five hundred pieces of gold shall be your reward."

"As Allah liveth!" gasped Abd el Melek, and his eyes glittered. "It shall be done, señor, depend upon it. Have him ready to depart this very day. I shall manage it."

He took his leave in haste. St. Rocher broke into protests, but O'Brien stilled them.

"Listen, St. Rocher—here you can help me. I must get out of this country or we both are lost, you comprehend? Our ship will be back at Salé in another three weeks, unless she has been sunk or taken by the Spaniards, and you must be there to meet her and go aboard. Take charge. Be ready to meet me—"

"Are you mad?" St. Rocher, pale as death, came to one elbow. "That is impossible—"

"Nothing is impossible," and O'Brien laughed gaily as he patted the gaunt hand. "Look you! I shall reach Salé a week after you—too late to meet the ship, unless you go ahead and take charge of her. She would not return for another month, you know. Meet her and set sail. After a week, remain off the coast—there'll be no bad weather this season; we must chance that. I'll come in a small craft from Salé, heading east by south. Hang off and on, a day's sail from the port. Simple enough."

"*Diantre!*" swore St. Rocher. "And if the Moors attack?"

"You have Ismail's letters. I have his safe conduct, freshly indited and sealed. We're safe enough from attack. Bah, old friend! No more protests. Boldness does it every time."

He went to his own room, a pleasant chamber opening on a court whose fountain splashed sweetly, and there drew out the note again. It was short.

> Jack: I saw you passing. I have been a slave here twelve years, since they captured my ship on the way to Rome. Ask Maimoran, the treasurer. He'll get you speech with me.
>
> —PHELIM.

O'Brien's tanned features worked strangely. Phelim O'Brien, his own brother, accounted dead these long years—a slave here! Well, please God, it would not be much longer for poor Phelim.

Little did O'Brien realize that Mulai Ismail had read that note and laughed softly over it, before allowing it to reach him.

WITHIN two hours Abd el Melek had earned his five hundred gold pieces, and O'Brien paid them with a glad heart, as St. Rocher and his escort departed. With St. Rocher went the English slave redeemed at Salé, Will Dowling by name; a faithful heart but no lion.

Thus, when the siesta hour was done, O'Brien found himself alone, with the half dozen black slaves provided to serve him, and the Sudanese guard. He was dressing to go to the palace as Ismail had ordered, when Abraham Maimoran arrived.

This man, whose father had elevated Ismail to the throne, was the chief of all the Jews in Morocco, and Ismail's treasurer. Each day he brought to O'Brien, as to the five hundred women of the seraglio and other pensioners, the exact measures of grain and food meted out by the emperor. Barbarically splendid as Ismail could be, he was also the most stingy of men, and himself kept the keys

of his storehouses and granaries. Maimoran was a man of forty, bearded and extremely ugly, wearing black Jewish hat and *djellab;* he was very crafty and avaricious. Like most of the Jews and nearly all the Arabs, he spoke Spanish fluently, and greeted O'Brien with great courtesy. When the receipt for the day's supplies was signed, he came to business.

"Señor Don," he said thoughtfully, "I am your friend, and shall prove it. Mulai Ismail is resolved that you shall become a convert to Islam; you are in great danger. His second wife is English —you have seen her palace? Good. She sent word to me that tomorrow you are to be killed, unless God intervenes or you accept Islam."

O'Brien smiled.

"Perhaps," he responded cheerfully, "I will myself intervene."

"That is what I wanted to suggest," said Maimoran, eying him. "I am going to the palace with you; we shall find Ismail at the stables. Take this—" he produced a lump of brown sugar wrapped in cloth. "Ismail will show you a white horse of Arab strain. Let the horse find this sugar in your hand."

"Eh?" Puzzled, O'Brien put the little roll into his pocket. "I do not understand."

"This horse, Achmet, has made the pilgrimage to Mecca," said Maimoran, with a faintly ironic smile. "Ismail venerates him, or affects to do so; takes all care of him with his own hands. Any criminal who touches that horse—which is difficult—receives pardon. Now do you comprehend?"

"Oh! Perfectly." O'Brien nodded eagerly. "My thanks, señor. And there is another matter in which you can aid me. I have just learned that a brother of mine—"

Maimoran intervened.

"I know; he spoke to me yesterday," he rejoined. "But I regret to say that Ismail has learned of the matter, and has placed him in charge of the lion pit, a most dangerous occupation. My master is a crafty man, señor, and without mercy. He himself has taken charge of your brother, I find, and means to witness your meeting."

"Think you he will ransom my brother?" asked O'Brien bluntly.

The other shrugged.

"Who can predict what that man will do, señor? I think not, however."

O'Brien took from his pocket certain papers, and selected one. It was a bill of exchange given by a Jewish merchant at Salé for certain loot purchased from O'Brien.

"Do you know this merchant?" he asked, handing over the bill.

"For five hundred Louis d'or!" Maimoran's eyes widened. "Certainly; Ben Hattar's name is good here, or in France or Italy. You wish me to cash this?"

"I wish you to keep it," said O'Brien, regarding him keenly. "And to earn it."

"Oh! That is another matter, señor. How?"

"You know the cemetery outside the Bab Mellah, at the end of the Street of Goldsmiths?"

Maimoran nodded, since the *mellah,* or Jewish quarter, was his birthplace.

"On next Friday noon," said O'Brien, "I want to find two good horses awaiting me there."

"What? You are mad!" The other started as though stung. "Señor, where would I obtain horses? And on Friday the cemeteries are thronged with visiting crowds, and Ismail preaches in the chief mosque—"

"Exactly," said O'Brien, smiling a little. "And there is another bill of exchange, of equal amount, to be placed to your credit with Ben Hattar—when I reach Salé. Friday is six days away; you have time for anything. Halfway on the road to Salé, at whatever place you may designate, I want two fresh horses awaiting me. That is all. Is it yes or no?"

Maimoran breathed quickly, plucked at his beard, eyed the floor. At last he shrugged.

"Agreed," he said and, tucking away the signed paper, rose. "Are you ready?

I dare not keep Ismail waiting."

They departed together, O'Brien very slim and straight in his plain black velvet, the guards preceding them with whips and clearing the way to the palace gates.

Well did O'Brien know that he was not apt to live until the next Friday, unless he used hand and brain. When Ismail became obsessed with an idea, all else yielded to it. Strongest of his ruling notions was a fanatical desire to convert Christians. And O'Brien was such a magnificent one!

"There's no trusting Maimoran, either," thought O'Brien, as he swaggered along, giving the renegades eye for eye, and affecting not to hear the piteous calls that the naked slaves on the walls sent after him. "He'll help, because I've assured him a staggering sum; but the knave would betray me in a moment if it were worth his while. Whether I can get to those horses on Friday, or can use them, I don't know—but what matter? We'll gamble largely, and trust to fate for the rest! So Ismail wants to see my meeting with Phelim, eh? Devil take him, he's planning some deep game, depend on it."

Passing the palace mosque, they went on by the enormous vaulted granary, so large as to contain the entire yearly crop tax of all Morocco, and on toward the gardens and stables, whose astonishing aspect greeted them from across a deep ravine. To the left was the palace of the English sultana, and everywhere ran walls—enormous walls, mile after mile of them, enclosing gardens, barracks, the city of the Sudanese, mosques, orchards and olive groves.

"Ismail has passed this way," said Maimoran grimly, but softly, and pointed to the bridge ahead, spanning the ravine.

A number of slaves were working at new foundations, and two of them, just freed from their chains, were dead. Their bleeding corpses were picked up and tossed in between the molds, and more mastic dumped in to be pounded down.

"Well, that be freedom for poor Tom, anyhow," said an English voice as O'Brien passed by.

They went on toward the stables—no mere sheds, but an entire city, complete to its mosque. Maimoran told his companion of the twelve thousand horses here, of the white dromedaries, and pointed to the garden spaces allotted to the lions and leopards and wolves. As they neared the enormous vaulted structures through which ran streams of living water, Maimoran indicated the granaries and saddle rooms—huge separate buildings at the side.

A thunder of hoofs; into the open burst Ismail and his following of kaids. Ismail brandished a lance in one hand, and in the other upheld one of his favorite sons, a child of two years, while riding at full speed; then, dropping the child into the arms of a slave, he whirled his horse and led his luckless followers straight for the gate of the lion garden. It was flung back as he thundered down, and he went at full career in among the trees, where half a dozen lions paced about. One of them halted facing him, with a snarling defiance. Ismail hurled his lance, leaped from the saddle and, scimitar in hand, hurled himself upon the transfixed beast. One blow, and the lion stretched out, quivering. One of the frightened keepers, a huge black, was edging away from two of the lions. With a spring, Ismail was at his side and hurled him at the beasts, who clawed him down instantly. A leap into the saddle, and the emperor was spurring out of the garden again toward the new arrivals.

"God save us all this day!" said Maimoran composedly. "Remember the sugar!"

Ismail drew rein before them, laughing eagerly.

"Allah upon you, Jew!" he cried. "Tell this unbelieving dog to look into the eyes of a horse that has made the pilgrimage, one of the Beni Adair strain! Quickly! Tell him to give look for look with a sacred creature that has more brains than most men!"

Maimoran translated. O'Brien, smiling, went up to the glorious white horse, an animal whose eye was wild as that of its master, still quivering from the proximity of the lions. The animal flung up its head with teeth bared, then scented the sugar in the closed hand, and the long slender muzzle came down to caress O'Brien, who stroked it and crooned softly. To all appearance the two were old friends, and Ismail stared down in open amazement. Then O'Brien flung one arm about the neck of the horse, and looked up into the savage face, and his eyes laughed.

"Allah wills that this horse is a friend, beloved of Allah!" he said. "Therefore grant me one favor."

"It is granted," said Ismail, frowning angrily, for it was his invariable custom to so do when any man gained the shadow of this horse. "What is it?"

"The life and freedom of one of your slaves, who is my brother."

"His life, gladly," said the crafty Ismail. "But his freedom I can not give, for that is in the hand of Allah alone. I know the man. Come! Bring him, Maimoran, for now I must rub down this delicate beauty of Arabia."

He whirled the horse and rode off, the kaids and guards after him. Maimoran chuckled and led O'Brien toward the buildings, and translated these last words.

"Well done, señor, well done! Now he is in good humor, for when he rubs down his horse, his mind is at ease. Come!"

So it was presently the privilege of O'Brien to see Ismail remove his saddle, mounted with gold and diamonds, and rub down the sleek Arab carefully. Into the distance, beneath the vaulted roof, stretched the long double row of stalls, running water in between, with every luxury the insensate imperial brain could imagine for these horses which he loved madly. When he had finished the task, Ismail seized a tomato from a basket borne by a slave, refreshed himself with the juicy fruit, then beckoned Maimoran.

"Tell the infidel to follow."

O'Brien strode along, openly astonished at all he saw, until he came to an alcove where Ismail halted. There upon a marble bench sat a man in Arab costume, but the hood of the white *djellab* was flung back, to reveal a gaunt face in which blue eyes blazed.

"Shamus!" he cried out loudly at sight of O'Brien. "Jack, old lad—God love you!"

O'Brien sprang forward, and then perceived how his brother Phelim was chained.

A CROWD had gathered about the spot, renegades and guards and court officials. O'Brien took his brother into his arms, and thought no shame of the swift tears; then he heard the voice of the gaunt Phelim, breathing soft words at his ear.

"Careful, for the love o' God! Watch your words. They know English. The devil means to do for you, Jack—"

O'Brien stepped back, and swung around to face Ismail, who was smiling strangely. He had felt the manacles and chains that held Phelim to the marble seat, and waited for Ismail to speak. He had not long to wait.

"Will you take his place, infidel, and let him go free?"

"No," said O'Brien, when Maimoran translated. Ismail looked taken aback at this reply. "But I will buy his freedom, if you will ransom him."

A sudden passion shook Ismail. He bared his white teeth in a snarl.

"I will not! Infidel, you have defied me enough—aye, the two of you! If it is the will of Allah, you shall die in two days."

And, without giving O'Brien any chance to reply, he beckoned to Maimoran and strode away. O'Brien, left alone with his escort, turned to Phelim, but the latter warned him.

"Get away with you, Shamus, quickly! He's seeking an excuse—get out of here!"

"Then God bless you for this time; I have plans afoot," said O'Brien, and so

turned away and started back to the city with his escort.

He knew this advice was wisdom; Ismail was not in one of his homicidal rages, but was in a crafty and deadly mood, fit for anything. And in these moments Ismail was more deadly than in his worst rages—which were more than half assumed to inspire fear in those around him.

Leaving the far spread palace, O'Brien came back to his own place again without further incident; he knew only that within two days something definite would take place. Ismail had some deep scheme in mind. And now, with St. Rocher gone and sunset at hand, for the first time a dreadful oppression seized upon him, and a sort of despairing madness.

Wine and brandy, made by the slaves for their own use by special permission of Ismail and sold surreptitiously to others, was at hand in plenty. O'Brien drank deep, in morose and gloomy mood, but the liquor brought him no cheer. He realized now how utterly alone he was, sitting in this house with only the black slaves around him. What had begun as a mad and gaily reckless adventure, was now sicklied over with the pale cast of reflection and circumstance.

Doom was gathering about him and upon him; he felt it, sensed it, and for once found himself well nigh helpless. He knew not what to do, which way to turn. Despite his boldness, his laughing defiance of Ismail which had first won that proud warrior's liking, he now saw himself lost beyond hope—because of Phelim. Somehow, Ismail was turned against him, no doubt by some court official who feared this infidel; yet the man was made up of whimsies and queer moods, like all despots. His actions could not be foretold from one day to the next.

"If I could get away with Phelim," mused O'Brien despondently. "But I can not. Horses are the means alone—there is no way of doing it, of getting that far. This accursed country, this devil of an emperor, have closed me in with insuperable barriers like their own gigantic walls; cruelty, lust, savagery all around—"

He staggered to the window and, flinging back the curtains, came close to the wooden bars across the opening. A sound fell upon his ears, and he stared at the blank dark walls close by; it came again, and he trembled, caught at the bars, wondering if he were mad or drunk, that he should hear it. But no; his brain was clear enough. Voices of men singing, chanting. Not the wild, mad Berber singing, nor the harsher Arab music, but chants that he recognized at once, swelling softly, sweetly, faintly as fairy music drifting to him from Ireland and the long ago.

Then he remembered what this house was, next to his own, and with a shaky laugh he wiped the sweat from his forehead and listened again. Yes, the Spanish monks were singing in their chapel, chanting their vespers with soft chiming of bells and an organ—these friars whom Ismail permitted here in the heart of his power, because they doctored his ill and disabled Christian slaves back to life and labor again. A practical man, Ismail, with shrewd wisdom behind his madness.

O'Brien flung himself down on his couch, and the chanting voices sent him into peaceful slumber. And, if there were a prayer on his lips, that was nobody's affair.

That sound of voices in the night, amid such surroundings, effected a singular change in him when he wakened and went about his morning's business. There was a smile on his lips, a gay laugh in his blue eyes. This hard man, whose keen wits and sharp sword had won him through wars and slavery, the trample of armies and the rush of buccaneers, looked out upon the city of the savage Arabs and Berbers, and his lips curled as he sharpened the long rapier which had served him so well.

"The will of Allah!" he murmured, with disdain. "Very well, Ismail; let that come to serve me as well. I'll set my God against your Allah. If it be so ordained, we'll win back to the clean sea

yet, Phelim and I—and then, glory be, I'll stick to the sea! And now it's all clear enough."

Clear enough—aye! He had forgotten the O'Brien clarion; here amid all Ismail's power, he had been impressed by everything around, had sunk to mere loneliness. *Lamh laidir an uachtar!* The Strong Hand Above! Well, he would stick to it, a very madman if need be; and why not? No sane logic could avail him in this place. The Strong Hand Above . . .

The words were upon his lips when men arrived seeking him—a number of palace guards, with a kaid who spoke Spanish and summoned him instantly to the palace. Ismail desired speech with him immediately. Beyond this the kaid would say nothing at all.

O'Brien buckled on the rapier and started forth. An insolent Arab pressed close to him and spat upon him; like a flash O'Brien buffeted the man to the ground. A yelling crowd began to surge in, and O'Brien whirled upon the kaid, his eyes flashing.

"You misbegotten dog!" he snarled, hand on rapier. "Call your guards around, whip off these curs—or I'll drive the life out of you and drag your body before Ismail! Quick!"

Startled, frightened, infuriated by these insults, the kaid nonetheless obeyed, stung into action. The guards closed in. A whip or two bit out, and the crowd shrank back. O'Brien strode along humming a gay tune; and if he went to death, he meant to go not alone. In this mood of reckless abandon, he came into the palace and found Ismail sitting, as was his wont, in a cool alcove while scribes and doctors of the law sat around. To his amazement, Ismail greeted him with friendly courtesy and ordered him to be seated, then extended a folded document bearing the golden seal of the emperor.

"Here," said Ismail abruptly, "is a letter to your master King James of England, now in exile. I shall confide it to your care, and I am also sending with it gifts for him, that he may know me for no mean person."

"Son of Idris, I am honored by this mission," said O'Brien.

"The throne of your master depends upon it," said Ismail, with a fierce intensity. "Now listen, infidel! I am offering to restore your master to the throne of England. My ships shall be gathered, ships from France will join us to carry my army. Your master is to come to Lisbon, where my fleet will meet him and take him to England. Think you this plan will succeed?"

O'Brien's head reeled at this fantastic scheme, worthy of such a man.

"Beloved of Allah," he said, "who can stand against your might? How can my master King James repay you for your kindness and friendship?"

"By listening to the arguments in that letter," responded Ismail, eagerly. "I have set forth to him the excellence of the true faith and have bidden him acknowledge the Prophet, whose name be exalted! He will see that my arguments can not be answered. Return to me with his answer in due time. Be prepared to leave here in ten days."

O'Brien found himself dismissed, and went back to his own house, somewhat in a daze. Yet, upon thinking over the matter, upon recollecting the eager intensity of Ismail, he saw that the man had been in deadly earnest, had forgotten momentarily everything else. Upon the morrow his mood would undoubtedly have changed.

When O'Brien would have gone out that afternoon, he found guards at his door with orders that he was to remain in the house, until next day. The walls were closing in upon him.

But, that night, came word from Phelim.

BRIBERY had done it, of course. One of the black slaves, serving O'Brien's dinner, laid a walnut beside the dish, touched his arm, and departed. O'Brien crushed the shell and found a roll of thin paper.

It held writing in French, obviously written by another slave for Phelim.

> Tomorrow afternoon they arrive, the champions. You must provoke the fight your own way, lest Ismail pit you against them all at once. There is no escape. Beware Le Borgne, an expert fencer. The Englishman has no skill. I am at the lion pit beside the Canot.
>
> —P. O'B.

The Canot, as O'Brien knew, was a great building in the center of the town, not far from his own quarters, where the slaves were housed under guard. Beside its wall was the wide pit where lions were kept—beasts destined to be pitted against dogs or naked men in fight. But what was this about champions?

O'Brien shrugged the matter away, as he tore up the note. No use looking for any reason in all this affair. Ismail was capable of giving him a letter to King James one day, and killing him the next. What could be afoot, he had no idea, except that it was evidently a question of fighting.

Maimoran arrived that morning with the daily rations. When he handed over the receipt to be signed, he slipped into O'Brien's hand a brass Spanish cuarto.

"Show this coin to the man holding the horses, and again to the second man. He will wait at the ford of the Oued Tiflet. That is more than halfway, but is the best I can do."

"Good," said O'Brien.

"And, señor, the other five hundred—"

"In the hands of Ben Hattar if I get through."

Maimoran departed. To O'Brien's questions of what Ismail intended, he had professed complete igorance, but did not fool O'Brien. The man knew something, but would not talk; a bad omen. He was cautious, too, in choosing for token a mere brass coin which would not incriminate him.

Still prevented from leaving the house, O'Brien mounted to the roof and spent most of the morning there, furbishing his rapier and watching Meknez in enforced idleness. Ceaseless caravans, files of men both troops and slaves, all raised a thin cloud of dust which settled and hung over olive groves and city in the windless air; rain was long due, but had not come, and the country was suffering.

A cracking of whips, a scattering of the throngs in the street, and past the house up the hill went two mules, driven hard; behind each of them trailed a screaming thing, drawn by the feet, hands clutching vainly at the stones. Again, later, came three creaking wagons piled high with human heads—tribute taken by the sword from a Berber tribe. O'Brien looked down at the crowds, and a thin smile curved his lips. He saw now what he must do; the only thing he could do.

"Not a soul dares brave the wrath of Ismail or his guards," he murmured thoughtfully. "In all this land, there is no one who is not cowed and prostrate. Well, then—the Strong Hand Above! If I can live until Friday, which is only two days away, well and good."

He must depend upon Maimoran, he perceived, upon the horses being ready, upon St. Rocher reaching Salé and meeting the ship—he must depend upon half a dozen things, any one of which might go wrong and ruin everything. The one quality lacking in Meknez was boldness; therefore audacity might well win everything for him, if he dared play the card. So he sat and smiled over Meknez, and laid his plans craftily, while the razor keen blue steel brightened under his hand.

The noon meal over, O'Brien was making ready for his siesta when a Dutch renegade who was emplacing guns on the walls came swaggering in with a message.

"Señor Ambassador! In an hour's time my master commands your presence in the gardens. I will come for you with an escort."

"You seem amused," said O'Brien, looking keenly at the man. "What is forward!"

"Nay, señor, that is the will of Allah, and how should I know?" And, laughing, the fellow departed.

An hour later he returned with six

Sudanese guards and O'Brien accompanied them forth.

Warned as he was, and with a grim prescience of what lay ahead, O'Brien wore only cotton shirt and loose trousers, with the rapier girded on, and over them a loose *djellab* of fine white wool, one of the gifts sent by Ismail. The Dutchman chaffed him on this costume and on the heavy boots beneath so different from the universal yellow slippers of the Arabs, but O'Brien only gave him a chill smile and answered nothing.

They came to the gardens behind the huge granary, those same gardens where Ismail had cut off the breasts of a favorite concubine because she plucked an orange without his leave; and here O'Brien beheld a real assemblage. The eighty personal guards of Ismail were grouped around an awning spread to shade him, and on either hand were the two hundred kaids and sharifs, or descendants of the Prophet, who made up his usual entourage. Besides these, again, were other Sudanese guards in rank about an open space, in the center of which was a gaunt naked figure lashed to a post with cords. This was Phelim O'Brien, as yet unhurt.

O'Brien threw back the hood of his *djellab* and saluted Ismail, who beckoned to him with an affable smile and, taking a rich pomegranate from a pannier of fruit, thrust it upon him.

"Sit, infidel; sit and talk!" he commanded. The Dutch renegade acting as interpreter, translated. "I know that you can fight. You are a good Christian. You cannot prevail against the will of Allah, however. You must become one of the Enlightened."

O'Brien met the savage dark eyes, smiled and put the yellow hair out of his eyes. Standing at one side, he saw three men, richly armed; one of them had but one eye, and he knew this must be Le Borgne. The other two were doubtless his companion champions.

"Beloved of Allah," responded O'Brien easily, with a merry smile, "that is not like to come about this day. Now I see yonder, bound to a post, my brother, whose life you gave me."

"You have good eyes, Christian," and Ismail chuckled. "But they do not see far enough. I gave you that man's life, true, but who am I to fight against the will of Allah? And Allah has willed that unless you call upon Mohammed, whose name be blessed, that man yonder will be impaled."

"His fate has nothing to do with me," said O'Brien, with affected carelessness. Here was the moment; he must attack, before Ismail did so. "Allah forbid that I become as one of those accursed weaklings who serve you, men who deny their race and faith. I see three of them there, unless I mistake—very dogs of the gutter. Would you have me to become like them?"

From some who understood his Spanish, came snickers as the words were translated. Le Borgne glared at him balefully; the Englishman and the Italian with him scowled at O'Brien. Truth it was that these three men, hastily summoned to Meknez, were the chief swordsmen of Ismail's forces and were drill masters of his troops; they were famed as invincible; chiefly Le Borgne, who held to a straight rapier instead of the scimitar.

Just what fine scheme Ismail had in mind, O'Brien never knew, for Ismail did not voice it. Before any reply could come to his speech, O'Brien split open the pomegranate, took a mouthful of the fruit, and spat forth seeds and pulp—full upon the three renegades. He broke into a sharp laugh, and his gaze gripped that of Le Borgne.

"Canaille!" he said in French. "This day you die, so play your part well for the last time!"

LE BORGNE snarled and started forward, but his companions checked him. Ismail was rising to his feet, for all this had taken place very swiftly, when O'Brien swung around to him with a great cry that checked his unspoken words.

"Beloved of Allah! I will make a wager with you! Let these three miscreant dogs come against me with weapons, and for each of them that is slain, give my brother yonder one day's reprieve from the stake! Thus shall the will of Allah be made manifest in this matter!"

When he had heard the translation Ismail smiled cruelly.

"So let it be, infidel," he ordained. "Take place there before your brother, and if these three can come past you, let them slay him. One at a time. You first, Ali!"

This was the Moslem name of the one eyed Frenchman.

O'Brien saluted the emperor gaily, and a shout burst forth from all around, as Ismail settled down on his cushions, eager to watch the swordplay. Turning, O'Brien strode out to the stake, and met the gaze of his brother Phelim, and heard the latter's fierce greeting.

"Hail and farewell, Shamus! Let me have that scoundrel of an Englishman to play with before I die, for he's a cruel devil to all of us."

"Not dead yet, Phelim," said O'Brien, and slipped out of the white *djellab*. His rapier flashed from the scabbard, and he leaned forward quickly and slit the bonds that held Phelim to the stake. "Bide you, now, and get the blood into your arms —you shall have him and full welcome, if the chance comes!"

There were no formalities, no delays. Le Borgne was already striding forward, his *djellab* flung off to display splendid garments beneath; O'Brien looked very slender there in the white sun, very boyish. Voices rose in swift, frenzied betting, the name of Ali predominating. Then the Frenchman, with a bitter oath, lifted his rapier and the blades clashed and clung.

Almost with the first touch, O'Brien knew that here was a master of fence indeed, but he laughed suddenly in the renegade's face and taunted him with low and barbed words.

"A good thrust, honest Moslem! How does the French tongue sound to you, good brave soul? You who denied your faith—on *tierce,* now; thrust inside, swiftly! That's the way, and here's the wrist in *carte*—"

Le Borgne disengaged, blood springing from his shoulder, a flame of hot anger in his eyes at the taunting words. He poured a flood of oaths at O'Brien and leaped in with a furious, driving blade; the hot sun, the dust, the fierce yells of the watchers, closed in the two men.

"The dogs are loosed, Shamus!" came the voice of Phelim in urgent warning.

From the corner of his eye O'Brien saw the other two renegades springing forward. No fair play here, but bloodlust in hot savagery clamoring for the kill! He was in *carte,* and forced suddenly, obliging the Frenchman to throw *carte* over the arm. Parrying *tierce* with a swift, strong blade, O'Brien made a lightning return in *seconde.*

The return was deadly. Le Borgne staggered back and flung out his arms, just as the other two came up with whirling scimitars and hurled themselves upon O'Brien. With one agile leap he was away from them, and his point drove lightly into the flanks of the Dutchman, who roared with pain and rage.

A rush and flurry of dust—then the Dutchman was roaring again, this time in a new voice, as the gaunt, naked shape of Phelim hurtled upon him barehanded. O'Brien had no time to give aid; the Englishman was upon him with a cut for the knees, and only a leap evaded it—a leap and a thrust forward, the long rapier scraping the brown throat.

"Close, Englishman!" gasped O'Brien. "Come, Sassenach — Moslem blade against Christian sword, eh? Here's for you—"

A clash, and the stout rapier parried the sweeping blow, licked in, a hot blue tongue, with hot blue eyes driving behind. The Englishman backed away, and that was fatal for him, since the long arm of O'Brien reached in and in, and the rapier touched him on the hip. He lost his head there and swung up for

a mad wild blow that never fell. Straight through his throat tore the blue steel; he stumbled back two steps, and went down on his face, dead.

Panting, O'Brien saw Phelim rise up out of the dust, blood upon his face but the Dutch renegade's sword in his hand. O'Brien looked at him and laughed, while yells resounded.

"Fair enough, Phelim! Sorry I could not leave you the Englishman—quick, lad! Can you leave your prison?"

"Aye, if I have anywhere to go," said Phelim, coughing with the dust. "But not at night, for there's a guard at the gate."

"What gate?" snapped O'Brien, wiping the sweat from his eyes.

"Next the Canot or Bitte. A lantern burns over the gate all night; the guard remains just inside."

"Tomorrow night, then. Sometime after midnight. Be ready."

The throng was closing in upon them. With an appearance of unconcern, O'Brien put up his rapier and donned his white *djellab*. Phelim dropped his weapon. The guards hemmed them in and Ismail stood before O'Brien, dark eyes ablaze.

"*Insh'allah!* That was well done, infidel!" he exclaimed loudly. "But you slew only two of them—therefore this slave shall live for two days, and on Friday at noon he shall sit upon a stake before your doorway, as punishment for having lifted hand against a true believer."

Ere this was translated, Phelim was led away. And now chanced a curious thing, for it was all silent, all unknown to those around, and yet plain as a bell to the two men concerned.

As O'Brien looked into the eyes of Ismail, temptation seized upon him. This man before him was the first swordsman, the first athlete, in Morocco; a man to whom no feat of arms or of physique was impossible. Yet O'Brien knew instinctively that he could draw blade and thrust home a split second before Ismail could whip out his scimitar. His fingers itched for the brain impulse—and in the eyes of Ismail he read that his thought was known to the other man.

For a long instant the two of them stood there motionless, and a slight smile came to the lips of Ismail; who was, in fact, said to read the thoughts of those with whom he talked. He waited, himself utterly without fear, to see whether O'Brien's brain would send the order to hand and arm; and in his eyes, O'Brien saw that he knew.

Then it was past and gone; the chance lost. Laughing, Ismail turned away, and O'Brien drew a deep breath. The Dutch artillerist came swaggering up to him with unexpected warmth.

"Señor, that was a noble feat of arms! I am glad you slew Le Borgne; I hated that man. For that, I love you. You are placed in my charge until Friday, when our lord speaks again with you. Until then you are to remain in your house."

So O'Brien strode away with the renegade, certain guards clearing the way. As they came into the high walled road piercing midway through the palace grounds, a building ahead of them discharged from doorways a great, endless swarm of children, all boys. To his astonishment O'Brien perceived that there must be from three to four hundred, jamming the whole roadway, their shouts and yells deafening. He turned to the renegade.

"What are those boys? Who are they? From the town?"

The other laughed amusedly as he replied:

"Nay, from the loins of Ismail, señor! You know there are five hundred women in his seraglio? That is true. Girl children are killed at birth; these are sharifs, of the blood of Idris, future sultans of this land, if it be the will of Allah! See that you jostle none of them; to lay hand on them is death."

O'Brien continued his way, and stopped at a bazaar to buy a short, curved dagger. The renegade aided in the purchase, and O'Brien smiled grimly at this.

O'BRIEN was feared; this was very evident. He found himself under a strict guard as though he were an actual prisoner. When Maimoran arrived next morning, the Jew explained this very suavely as being for his own good; the troops were incensed against the infidel who had slain their champions, he said. O'Brien merely looked him in the eyes, and he faltered in the lie. Then, with a swift glance to make sure none was within hearing:

"Señor, you can not get away. It is madness."

"Madness is needed," said O'Brien. "The horses?"

"Will be walked up and down, as for sale. The spot is not far from the animal bazaar. From seven o'clock onwards."

"I shall want them about eight," said O'Brien. "If I want them at all."

Maimoran shrugged as the Dutch renegade sauntered into the room, got his signed receipt, and so departed. To get away from the eternal surveillance, O'Brien went up to the flat roof and sat by the parapet, watching the city below. The day was cloudy and a drizzle of rain began to fall, lending this city of blood a dreary and dismal aspect.

O'Brien perceived very clearly that he had passed all limits. Beyond doubt, palace intrigues were at work to insure his death; the renegades, strong in influence, and many of the Arab kaids, were certainly working on Ismail, with whose suspicious nature a word or a look could be more potent than any sane reason. With the morrow, Ismail would be preaching in the chief mosque; his fanaticism would be inflamed and anything might result.

"This mad venture," reflected O'Brien, "has cost a huge sum and has brought in nothing except a few cheap gifts from Ismail. If Phelim gets away, then it's well worth it all; but it seems a pity not to make this devil Ismail contribute to the O'Brien fortunes. Faith, they're in a devilish bad way at present!"

He had brought a supply of tobacco from the ship, and sat there sucking at his broken pipe and using the last of his tobacco, when a tumult in the street below drew his attention. Ismail and his retinue were wending into the city, and O'Brien watched the procession of riders and guards with frowning intentness as they drew past and out of his sight. He felt thankful that Phelim was not confined in the palace. Behind those triple walls, with their hundreds of guards, his brother would have been far beyond reach.

And yet, with the moment close at hand, O'Brien knew that his simple plan of getting Phelim and riding for Salé was sheer madness. In vain did his mind cast about for any better scheme; there was none, and the time was growing shorter with each hour. Hearing a step, he glanced around and saw the Dutch renegade.

"News, señor!" The man was laughing heartily as he spoke. "My comrade Ahmed has just arrived to relieve me until midnight, and is taking you this afternoon to the palace by special command. You will like Ahmed; he was a Greek once, but Mulai Ismail turned him into a eunuch and now he is in charge of the seraglio guards. The seraglio means to have a look at you, so brush up, señor, and don your best!"

"Is this some jest?" queried O'Brien coldly.

"Devil take me, señor, if it is! Lalla Aisha, the giant negress who is first lady of the seraglio and who rules Ismail with a rod of iron, has commanded your presence in the gardens."

At this junction Ahmed arrived, puffing. A fat, unhealthy man, splendidly attired and armed, who addressed O'Brien with a servile air, in good Spanish. A fawning, craven fellow, this Greek, but one who could be insolent and bold enough with those under him. O'Brien got rid of him curtly, promising to be ready after the siesta. What this summons might hold remained to be seen; he doubted whether Ismail had anything

to do with it, knowing that Lalla Aisha did indeed rule Ismail, or rather was one with him in his rule, for she was his one and only confidante and held his implicit trust in all things.

So it was with curiosity rather than apprehension that O'Brien set forth with the Greek and four Sudanese, after the siesta. About his neck, beneath the *djellab* in native style, was slung the silver hilted dagger he had purchased that morning. The Greek was fawning and obsequious, and when O'Brien roughly commanded his silence, he swaggered along sulkily.

Entering the palace precincts, they did not seek the vast expanse of gardens behind the granary, but turned instead off to the left, into a portion of the triple walled grounds that was new to O'Brien. The Sudanese guards were replaced by two huge black eunuchs armed with whips, and presently O'Brien was ushered alone into a small garden surrounded with high walls where were latticed balconies. The Greek plucked at his arm.

"Go forward, señor. Seem to see and hear nothing. We await you here. Return in half an hour."

The doors closed behind him.

O'Brien sauntered among small orange trees toward a tiled fountain in the midst of the court. Around this, on all four sides, ran an arched colonnade. No one was visible. He was to all appearance entirely alone, yet he felt at once that unseen eyes were watching him; behind the lattice work of the balconies he caught a movement of robes.

Anger seized upon him, for he comprehended that he had been fetched here merely as a sight to amuse the women of the seraglio. He circled about the fountain, then flung back the hood of his white *djellab*, and his blue eyes struck around here and there. He had not taken note of the entrance, and now could not see by which door he had entered—all four sides of the alcoved quadrangle looked exactly alike. As he hesitated, a soft voice floated to him, a woman's voice, and to his amazement the words were in English: yet nothing could now amaze him in this city.

"The door under the green arch, and quickly! Lose not a moment!"

O'Brien glanced around, and perceived a green tiled arch to his left; beneath it was a door, one of the many opening off the colonnades. A sense of urgency was upon him, perhaps from the inflection of that woman's soft voice; through his confusion, his bewilderment, pierced a sharp note of warning, of peril close upon him.

Trap or not, he dared not hesitate. Turning, he strode quickly to the arches, but not directly to the green one. Once beneath them, he turned again and an instant later was at the door indicated; rather, the double door, set upon pivots in the native style and opening toward him. He caught a large iron ring in the door, and one side swung outward, showing a tiny tiled passage within. It was empty.

O'Brien stepped forward, and as he did so caught at the dagger beneath his *djellab*, and plucked it out. The corridor in which he stood was very narrow, but high, and light came from windows twenty feet above him. Next instant came a step, and a single figure in light fluttering robes, hand extended. A woman, young, golden haired, gray eyes wide with eagerness and swift excitement.

"Come!" It was the same voice that had floated to him, a rough and impulsive voice now, and he perceived that if she were indeed English, she could have been no lady of quality "A murrain on ye—art struck dumb? Come! D'ye not know it was all a trick, that Ismail planned to find you in the seraglio that he might kill you?"

"Nonsense, mistress," said O'Brien calmly. "I have his own safe conduct—"

She laughed, bitterly enough.

"Aye, and therefore he must seek means to break his word openly to all men. He had ye brought here, and who would believe it as the truth? But come! I can take care of you; Lord knows I care not for these black devils—come!

Y'have not a moment to lose gawking!"

Somewhat stupefied by all this, O'Brien found himself accompanying her, at so rapid a pace he must needs run to keep up. He had not the slightest idea whither they went; now along narrow corridors, then for a moment out in the open, flitting across the top of the enormous walls, only to duck swiftly into narrow doorways beyond.

They crossed one great tiled room where fountains plashed from the walls, climbed long stairs, and after what seemed miles, came into a little bare quadrangle enclosed by blank walls. The woman pointed to flat stones upon the ground, at the farther end.

"There lie the daughters of Ismail—damn his black skin! Hurry on—almost there now."

She was panting, and color flamed in her cheeks; a handsome wench enough, thought O'Brien, as he followed into another doorway and narrow corridor beyond. Then she paused abruptly at a door, took out a huge key, unlocked it swiftly, and flung it open.

"Inside—quick! Guards are close—"

O'Brien entered; she closed the door behind them both, turned the key again, and stood breathing rapidly, but he paid her no heed, for he was staring at this place, like none he had seen or would ever see again. Her laugh sounded at his ear, low and wild.

"Art safe enough here, my handsome soldier! None but Ismail himself dares to touch that door or enter this room."

He could well believe it.

A huge room was this, high ceiled, with one small high window to give light and air, but across it was a heavy grille of iron bars. One end of the room was piled high with great chests, and others stood about the walls. Deep shelves held smaller boxes and hide packets; rolls wrapped in silk and linen, boxes large and small, made up the helter-skelter contents of the place.

"I stole the key from Lalla Aisha today," said the woman exultantly. "I knew where she keeps it hidden; she will not discover the loss until tomorrow."

"And just what is this place?" queried O'Brien.

"The miser's treasury!" Her voice rose in shrill delight. "His storehouse of wealth, of riches plundered from all Maroc! Those chests hold coin and gold dust; here are gifts brought to him, jewels from all the world; seek for yourself, take what you will! There is no haste. Fill your pockets, handsome soldier! Then we'll talk, you and I."

O'Brien perceived that she must be speaking the truth, yet could scare credit it. He went to one of the chests and flung back the lid, to find it filled with Berber jewelry of silver and raw gold. One side of the room was heaped with arms—fusils, swords, spears, all of the richest workmanship, most of them studded with coral, inlaid with ivory, sparkling with gems.

The smaller chests and boxes were given over to jewels of every sort, good and bad, mounted and unset. O'Brien rummaged among the whole, but his thoughts were rather with this wretched Englishwoman than with the stuff before him. Thanks to her, he was temporarily escaped from the trap Ismail had set for him, yet there must come a reckoning. It was a curious twist of human nature which bade Ismail lay such a trap, when he could have flung his guards on this man at any moment; still, history was replete with instances of this exact trait, and it might be that Ismail's worst nature was seeking a specious pretext for the murder of O'Brien.

No man, however, could entirely disdain this enormous mass of wealth, gathered during thirty years or more, the loot of all Morocco and the lands beyond. A box opening to his hand was heaped to the brim with gems wrenched from their mounts, to many still clinging fragments of gold; here were the white blaze of diamonds, the rich luster of rubies and emeralds, the soft sheen of pearls, all flung together in one mass.

O'Brien dipped into the casket deliberately, stuffed jewels by the handful into

his inner pockets, then turned away and halted before an open Buhl secretaire, doubtless a gift from the French monarch. Upon it were sheets of vellum, reed pens and brushes, ink pots, and an open leather case in which was a huge seal of solid gold, with vials of liquid and sheets of gold leaf close by. He saw at a glance that this must be the sacred seal itself.

The woman was speaking, but O'Brien ignored her. He leaned over, seized upon a sheet of vellum, and fell to work. She joined him, watching him awhile at the business, and uttered a sniff of disdain.

"Handsome soldier, is this a time to play?"

"This is play well worth while," he rejoined, and straightened up. "There! Let it dry, and we'll add the writing above it, when—"

He turned from the vellum, upon which now glittered the golden seal that was revered throughout Morocco, as she caught his arm and drew him around.

"Look at me, handsome soldier!" she exclaimed, her eyes a-glitter. "Now it be my turn, since naught else interests you here."

And O'Brien knew suddenly that here was a new peril, which most men would have welcomed gladly enough.

"I HAVE seen you before today," she said, her hand caressing his shoulder as she spoke. "And now, what matter? Here we be alone, you and I; and see, I have a knife ready if they take us. Do you know how Ismail kills his women? He makes them kneel before one o' those iron chests, with their breasts over the edge, and has two slaves slam down the lid. Would like to see this body o' mine so treated, handsome soldier?"

"Peace, woman, peace!" said O'Brien, and put her hand away, frowning. "This is no time to be love making, and I have no mind to it. By now they'll be searching the city for me."

"Like enough," she said, with a shrug. "But I know one way out of here, if you can kill the black who guards the little gate. Wilt take me with you?"

"Peace!" commanded O'Brien. "Peace, for God's sake, and let me think!"

Time had passed. In this silent room, with all the noises of the palace shut away, the little high window was darkening.

O'Brien had no mind for the woman, even as he said. Yet he was no fool, and he knew that without her help he could never be drawn from the trap into which he had fallen. There in the city, Phelim awaited him this night, and with morning would be two horses ready.

Where could a third enter into the matter?

This woman, taken two years ago aboard a ship bound for the plantations, begged him to rescue her from this living hell of slavery. She had done her part, too, had acted with a courage and audacity few men would have equalled. Beyond shame or pride, she besought his love with ardent words, tempted him into a madness that could end only in ruin. The thought of Phelim steadied him, held him upright.

Presently he turned to her, caught her hand in his; a desperate resolution was in his voice as he spoke to her, quietly, patting her broad, roughened fingers.

"Hark'ee, mistress; I must speak plainly to you. Heaven knows I'm grateful to you for what you've done, but seek no love of me, now or later. That's final."

She drew away her hand, snatched at her knife. Even in the gathering darkness he could see the hot flame of her eyes.

"Disdain me, would you!" she cried out. "Because I've belonged to the Moors—"

"Stop your nonsense," and his harsh voice silenced her. "Nothing of that sort, mistress. I'm sorry for you, I owe you much, and I'll do my best to pay it, in my own way. If we can get you out of here, well and good; your life will be your own again. But I've a brother who's a slave in the town yonder. Tonight I've arranged to help him away.

You shall have a share in it and somehow we'll manage the job, since we must. Does that suit you?"

He heard her quick, hard breathing at his side.

"I'll be true to you, handsome soldier, I'll be your slave and—"

"You fool, put your mind to the right things!" snapped O'Brien angrily. "Talk about love later on, if you will. Now we must think about life itself. All Meknez will be scoured for me this night, and I've plenty to do besides dilly-dallying. Put your thoughts on escape, mistress, for that's more the point just now."

She fell to weeping softly, and O'Brien drew away from her and stretched out on a pile of soft silks. After a little he heard her voice.

"Be not angry, handsome soldier," she said. "We must bide here a bit, till midnight, then we can get away—"

Darkness had come now, and with the darkness came the faint, distant shrieks of a man that after awhile became silent. Although O'Brien knew it not, these shrieks came from the Greek renegade, who had been crucified against a mud wall for having lost his prisoner. And the Greek had not died alone.

O'Brien was relaxed, dozing quietly to pass the time, when there came a flurry of movement, and he found the woman at his side, gripping him hard, her voice low and tense.

"I took the key from the door—"

"Eh? What the devil is it?" he exclaimed, sitting up.

"Quiet, quiet!" A sudden agony of terror was in her voice. "I heard steps—they're at the door! It must be the black devil himself; none else would come; he has his own keys—"

O'Brien stiffened. He, too, heard a thin scrape of feet, and heard something at the door, a key feeling for the hole, doubtless. Then he was on his feet, pressing the woman down, flinging the piled silks over her. His rapier came out, for he had put aside his *djellab* because of the heat, and with one swift step he was at the door, behind it, so that it would open against him.

The massive portal swung a little, and he heard the voice of Ismail giving some order, and the response of a slave. Then the door opened wider. A beam of light penetrated into the treasure room and Ismail entered alone, holding a silver lantern over his head. The emperor set the lantern on the floor and swung the door shut again with a crash.

Then he saw O'Brien, saw the rapier point licking out and touching his side.

For a long, long moment there was dead silence, tension gathering swiftly upon both men, the lanternlight striking up full at them. Immobile, rigid, O'Brien stood like a statue, his rapier piercing Ismail's robe, touching the hard muscled body within. He was tempted still to drive home the thrust—he had fully intended doing so—but Ismail's steady gaze held him.

In that savage gaze was no fear whatever, but a calm acceptance, a sure understanding. The eyes of the two men held in a level and unfaltering gaze, and grudging admiration swept into O'Brien's heart. Then, unexpectedly, came a sweep and flurry, and the woman was on her feet, plunging forward with knife upraised.

"Stop!" O'Brien's voice checked her. "Stop!"

Ismail glanced around, and for an instant wild fury contorted his features, but only for an instant. She halted the thrust, her eyes flaming on O'Brien.

"Art a fool?" she rasped.

"Not such a fool as to kill him, when he can serve us," said O'Brien, and this drove into her wild brain. "Tell him that he'll die if he cries out. Not otherwise."

She snarled at Ismail, but repeated the threat, and a proud smile touched the bearded lips as he responded. She spat an oath at him.

"He says he'll die if it be the will of Allah, and not otherwise. Let me kill the black devil, d'ye hear?" she panted, with a volley of hot oaths. "If you'd seen what I have—"

"Silence, woman. Tell him that I am the will of Allah just now."

Ismail heard this and, watching O'Brien's eyes, laughed suddenly.

"Bon Cristiano!" he exclaimed. The two words held a wealth of meaning. And O'Brien, meeting that calm gaze, knew that despite all blood and cruelty and despotism, here stood a man before him, the same fearless man who had hurled himself upon the lion. He, too, broke into a short laugh, and in this moment arose a singular kinship and comprehension between the two of them—though it was short lived.

"Take his arms," said O'Brien.

The woman obeyed, stripping Ismail of two daggers and his magnificent diamond studded scimitar. As her hands passed over him, Ismail ground his teeth in a spasm of sheer rage; it passed swiftly. O'Brien's cool gaze perceived that the woman was shivering now, trembling violently, exactly like the horse forced into proximity with the lion.

"Pick up the lantern," he ordered, "and hold it to light the desk yonder. Tell him to sit down and write a free passage for us, in his own hand."

"He—he can not write," she answered, with a frightened glance. "He can read, but has never learned to write. It is well known."

"The devil!" said O'Brien, and regarded his captive thoughtfully. Then he pointed to the gold circlet on Ismail's hand, a ring which he had seen kissed in veneration by many; a plain gold ring graven with the name of Ismail.

The other understood his look and gesture, and burst into swift passionate speech. In a flash his self-control was swept away; Ismail flew into a spasm of wild ferocity, real or assumed, so that the woman shrank back and clutched her knife. O'Brien laughed and thrust a little, sending the rapier point under Ismail's skin.

"That's better!" he observed. "Faith, the scoundrel near had me, if he'd kept up his royal dignity! But now he's no better than a madman. Quick, mistress! Something with which to tie him up."

Under the sting of the steel, Ismail flinched not. Instead, he was working himself into a raging fury, regardless of any threat; his voice swelled loud and louder, and in another moment he would be screaming out curses and shouting for aid—but this moment never came. O'Brien shifted his weight, let the rapier fall from his hand; swift as light, he lashed in one short, hard blow with his body behind it. Straight to the angle of that cruel jaw drove his fist, and Ismail toppled backward, knocked senseless. O'Brien chuckled as he surveyed the prostrate man—then leaped forward barely in time to check the woman's knife from slitting the brown throat. He flung her away, roughly.

"Fool, fool!" she babbled at him. "If ye do not—"

"Silence!" snapped O'Brien, and his voice was like a whip, so that she cowered suddenly and fearfully. "Put up that knife. Get me strips of cloth, and quickly! They know he's here, and we've got one chance, and one only. Do as I say!"

He slipped the ring from Ismail's hand, stripped off the jeweled turban and the yellow cloak, then took the strips she handed him and made shift to tie Ismail hand and foot, and to bind up his mouth and jaw so that he could not shout. He could not blame the woman for her lust to kill Ismail, but he rose and restrained her less roughly.

"Look you, mistress, our hope lies ahead, not here. If we kill him, he'll be found soon enough; horsemen will go out, couriers to every city in Morocco, with the news, and we'll have no earthly chance to get clear. But let him be found thus, and his own pride will keep it quiet. Also, he'll think we're somewhere in the city. It'll be morning before they dare to seek him, so we'll have a good chance. Will there be a guard outside? What did he say when he entered?"

"He bade the guard wait," said she, in sullen humor.

"Look out, then, and see. If there's

but one guard, bid him enter," said O'Brien grimly. "You'll have your fill of blood before this night's out, I promise."

She opened the door cautiously, peered out into the corridor, then spoke, lowering her voice to a crude imitation of Ismail's tones. O'Brien caught up his rapier and stood ready. A Sudanese, one of Ismail's personal bodyguard, came into the room—and the rapier point went through his throat.

"That's better," said O'Brien coolly, and put up his weapon. "Blood or no blood, get you into his clothes, and pull up the hood of the *djellab*. I'll don those of Ismail, and we may have a chance to get out of here alive. Move fast, woman! Life hangs on it now!"

WHEN the palace guards changed at midnight, a Sudanese took his station at the little gate beside the seraglio mosque, which Ismail habitually used when unattended. As the emperor was likely to come or go at any hour, there was no danger of the Sudanese' relaxing his vigilance.

Barely had the man settled down to his watch, indeed, when the door opened abruptly and two figures appeared, one of them carrying a lantern; its rays fell upon the diamond studded scimitar of Ismail, and the black leaped to attention. The two were about to pass when a low ejaculation broke from him, and he leaned forward; the hand that held the lantern was not black but white! He stooped to peer suspiciously at the two figures, but that was his bane, for a curved blade was plunged into his throat, and he became a huddle on the stones.

The lantern was extinguished. The two figures moved out from the walls and were gone in the direction of the city beyond.

Exultation filled O'Brien as the palace fell into the darkness behind. The impossible had been accomplished, but perils enough remained ahead. He dared not seek his own quarters, for these would certainly be watched. What had just chanced, showed that Ismail's ring and cloak were not sufficient to get them past danger; nor was the folded vellum in his pocket, bearing the golden seal, for it was still blank.

"Whither now?" said the soft, husky voice at his side.

"To get my brother. Near the Canot or Bitte."

"No getting out of the city before the gates are opened at sunrise."

"No need," replied O'Brien. "Horses will be waiting outside."

He still wondered about the third horse; this, he reflected, could be somehow managed.

Twice they encountered parties of the night watch, but these were seen afar because of their lanterns, and the two hid themselves in side streets on each occasion. Presently loomed ahead of them the huge building that housed the Christian slaves each night, lanterns burning outside its entrance. Following the directions of Phelim, O'Brien turned the narrow street beyond, and sighted a light over a small doorway. Beneath the light lounged a black soldier, one of the ordinary troops, in a tattered *djellab*, spear in hand.

As the two figures came up the lonely, deserted hillside street, the black caught sight of them, recognized the robe of Ismail, and affrightedly leaped to attention. O'Brien held his dagger ready—there could be no mercy, no faint heart, at this crisis! As they came within the circle of light, however, the alert black perceived the imposture. He leaned over to peer into their faces, and some animal sense warned him of peril. As O'Brien moved, he twisted himself aside, and a cry came from his lips.

Too late! O'Brien leaped, and the steel drove out. Here was no craven, however, but a fighting man; hurt though he was, the black got his back to the wall, whipped out a knife in his left hand, stabbed desperately with spear and blade as O'Brien gripped his throat. A third

body hurtled in upon them—the woman, stabbing savagely, plunging her knife repeatedly into the black body with a vicious and ferocious hatred.

The soldier went limp. The hurried panting and the stamp of feet quieted as O'Brien half hurled, half dragged the man's body back into the archway. Before him was blackness.

"Phelim!" he exclaimed guardedly.

"You, Shamus? God be praised!" came the response. "I'm alone here—"

O'Brien reached up to the lantern and got it off the hook, and its rays showed a deep and narrow chamber, where a mat served Phelim for bed. The gaunt man came to him eagerly, clung to him; there the two men, so long apart, embraced with the vague light of freedom on their horizon.

It was some time before O'Brien could quiet the sobbing man, for in this moment Phelim quite gave way to emotion. Then he recollected the woman, and gently parted the arms that hung about him.

"I'm not alone, Phelim—faith, man, will ye give me air? And glory be, but I've a present for you, a little remembrance from Ismail himself to be putting heart into your body." And with a laugh, he turned toward the entrance. "In with you, mistress! And bring the scimitar that we— What the devil!"

He stepped back hastily across the black's body. The woman had not followed him in, but was half leaning against the side of the arch in a despondent attitude. She put out a hand, and O'Brien caught her as she slumped forward.

The knife of the black man was buried to the hilt in her side.

"Phelim! Lend a hand here. Devil take it, wake up, man!"

Between them they lifted her inside, shrouded the lantern, fell to work. In another moment they found it was hopeless; Phelim, amazed as he was at sight of her bared woman's body, asked no questions but shook his head.

"The life's ebbing out of her, Shamus."

"Aye, poor thing! Best let the knife be. Lord, but she looks peaceful! Say a prayer for her, Phelim—it's long since I was praying."

"More shame to you," said Phelim, and fell to saying a prayer.

Midway of his muttering, the woman's eyes opened and she looked up at O'Brien. Peaceful she looked, indeed, and a smile touched her lips.

"Handsome soldier!" she murmured, so that Phelim's jaw fell at hearing the English words. "I'll be all right in—in a minute. La, but I be tired! Will ye not gi' me one kiss, my handsome soldier?"

"That I will, heart of gold," said O'Brien, and stooped so that for a moment his lips lay upon hers.

When he lifted his head, her eyes had closed again and her lips were smiling; she lay there dead, more happily than she had lived. Phelim touched her face and crossed himself.

"Well, Shamus lad—and what does it all mean?"

O'Brien extinguished the light and then settled down, and the two of them fell to talking.

There were long years to be bridged, and Phelim, although two years the junior, looked now a man of sixty. The present was more important than the past, however, and when O'Brien had sketched the night's happenings, Phelim fingered the diamond studded scimitar and growled an oath.

"Look you, Shamus! With the blank sealed vellum, we'd have a chance to get out the gates this night, before Ismail is found and starts the hounds after us. That is, if I had aught to write with. I know the cursed language, can read and write it well, can pass for a Moor if need be. All we need is to get past the gates, but there's the rub."

O'Brien laughed gaily.

"Cheer up, old heart! I'm stuffed like a sausage—here's brush and ink cube, so fall to work. Mayhap you're right about passing the gates, for they'll be tight guarded after Ismail gets loose, sure enough. All my plans have gone amiss now, and it's devil take the hindmost.

Can we wait in that cemetery for the horses which will be coming?"

"Aye," growled Phelim, searching the dead guard for flint and tinder to relight the lantern. "You take this man's clothes, I'll take my own. With sunrise, the folk will be flooding out into the cemeteries; hillmen are encamped now outside the walls by the hundred. Best go out by the north gate and work our way around, eh? That'll throw them off the trail later, when they get after us. Ah, here's the cursed pouch! Now for a light."

"How have you lived so long in this land, Phelim?" asked O'Brien curiously, while the other scraped with the flint and steel. "A man such as you—"

Phelim uttered a low, harsh laugh.

"How? Because, praise be, I'd learned fortification. I've planned the seventy-odd forts Ismail has scattered all over the country—I've shown him the use o' bastions and the like. I've guided his building from here to Tangier. I made myself too useful to kill, and when a pinch came, as it did once or twice, I took up the study of their dog religion and they had hopes of converting me. But it's been hell, Shamus, hell! Now give me the writing stuff, and we'll get the job done while you change clothes."

The lantern caught and flickered up. Phelim spat on the ink, took brush and reed pen and fell to work scrawling Arabic above the seal of Ismail. O'Brien set to stripping the dead black, with a grimace of distaste, and moved the woman's body gently away.

"Poor soul!" he said. "Well, she had her day, and Ismail knows it was her hand that betrayed him."

"Bah!" said Phelim callously. "Women are less than dogs in this land. She served her turn and died well; let me have as good an ending when the time comes! It's done. Leave that blade of Ismail's here. I dare not carry it—too well known. Put it in her hands, if you like. I'll take the black's weapons and do the talking. You carry the lantern. Where's that letter you spoke of—the one to King James?"

"Here," said O'Brien.

"Show the seal if need be. Pull the hood well over your head. We have renegades to deal with at the gates, so mind your tongue. Now for it—ready?"

O'Brien caught up the lantern, cast a glance at the smiling face of the woman; and next moment the two brothers were on their way.

THE gate was passed without a question, and the lantern was handed over to the guards with a coarse jest from Phelim that drew a roar of laughter.

In silence, now, the two followed the road that skirted the walls, those enormous battlements rising huge and menacing off to their left, with only a light here and there showing. No stars were out, for rain clouds still clung low to the hills, but Berber camp-fires glimmered down in the valley.

O'Brien's heart was high as he strode along, and he hummed a lilting Irish marching song until Phelim abruptly bade him be silent, and pointed to lights ahead.

"The Bab Berdain—the Gate of Victory. Smell the heads on the night wind? Faugh! The cemeteries lie beyond, and we'll cross them; tomorrow they'll have dances there, and snake charmers and magicians. Making ready the pits for the fire walkers now. No more noise! Devil take you, have ye no sense?"

O'Brien laughed softly and followed in his brother's steps.

Now they were in among the tombs and stone slabs, following one of the many trails, and so came to a walled tomb with a great dancing platform beyond it. Phelim turned in at the lighted entrance, and the two of them slipped into a dark corner. One or two Arabs were at prayer, several others were chatting in low tones.

"Sleep here till sunrise," grunted Phelim.

And so they did, the strangest sleeping place O'Brien had ever known, with the drift of songs coming from the Berber

camps, the singsong chants of the night watch along the great walls above, the taint of corpses on the wind—and Morocco, vast and arid and terrible, running out to the horizon on every side. Small wonder, he thought, that few slaves ever escaped from this city. For beyond the rugged land was the barrier of the sea. Yet he laughed a little at thought of how men must have been seeking him, and how they would be seeking him on the morrow, and so fell upon sleep beside the snoring Phelim.

When he wakened, dawn was coming up, and hunger was gnawing at him, for he had not eaten since the previous noon. He found the tomb empty except for two sprawled sleepers.

"Art a-hungered?" growled Phelim as they rose and left. "So am I. By the saints, you little know what hunger means till you've been a slave in this land, where a crust of bread will get a man slain. We can not seek food at the camps here, for I cannot speak the Chleu tongue and these Berbers mock all Moors."

"Starve for it, then," said O'Brien with a shrug. "Wait; I have some silver pieces—take them and buy something to eat, eh?"

Phelim nodded, took the money and went striding away across the graves, toward the lower ground. O'Brien sat down to wait, and the day broadened overhead. Presently Phelim came back and rejoined him, bearing a great pouch of dates, a round loaf of bread, and a leathern water bottle.

"Did you pay for them, then?"

"Aye," said Phelim, with a grim look, but O'Brien saw the splotch of fresh blood on his tattered robe and asked no more questions.

They ate in silence, washed down the meal with water, and presently sauntered on toward the gate of the *mellah,* as the Jewish quarter was known. The gates had already been opened, country folk were entering, and those of the city were already coming out to the cemeteries. The two fell in among the throngs and then sat down by the side of the road, O'Brien keeping up the hood of his *djellab;* the rapier hampered him, but he made the best of it, and they were inconspicuous among the crowd coming and going. When sellers of sweetmeats or water approached, Phelim gruffly sent them on their way.

They both knew that now all depended on Maimoran, and O'Brien had the brass cuarto ready.

After a little there was great disturbance around the gate, whose massive portal was piled with pyramids of Berber heads. Soldiers appeared, then a company of horsemen came trotting out, spurred to a gallop, and went off down the road in a cloud of dust.

"Ismail's out," said O'Brien, and laughed softly.

"And the roads are stopped," added Phelim, significantly, squinting keen eyed at the lessening cloud of dust. "Pray heaven it rains today, for dust will betray us as we ride."

"You're a good mediator with heaven," and O'Brien turned over his hand to show the spatter of a drop. In ten minutes a fine drizzle of rain was coming down.

Now the morning life was taken up full swing, wagons coming up to the gates, throngs pouring out to the cemeteries and to the animal bazaar down the road, great crowds of women flocking forth on their one day of freedom to visit their dead, white clad save for the one little eye hole. Donkeys crowded the road, laden with firewood and vegetables; lumbering camels swung along; gangs of slaves and criminals marched past to the eternal labor of building. And of a sudden O'Brien came to his feet.

"Ready, Phelim! Here's our man."

He was approaching, indeed—a Jew, as his black cap and cloak testified, leading two saddled horses, apparently superb beasts, loudly bawling them for sale. Jests flew at him from every side; let Ismail or one of the kaids see these horses, and he would quickly get rid of them, and have a bastinado into the bar-

gain! And since when had Jews owned horses, when all such animals in the land were the private property of Ismail?

"By Allah, I will buy your horses!" cried out Phelim. "Ho, Jew! Let us try them out to test their gait! I'll buy them, Allah upon you!"

There was a huge guffaw at this, and men looked to see whether the Jew were simple minded enough to let himself be bilked. O'Brien came close to the man and thrust the brass cuarto at him, then pocketed it quickly and took one of the bridles. Apparently overborne, the Jew broke into loud protests; Phelim drew knife and threatened to slit his belly, and leaped into the saddle. Next instant the two were spurring away down the road amid roars of laughter, while the Jew hastened to get himself out of sight inside the walls of his own *mellah*.

"Faith, that was a pretty play," cried O'Brien. "Would that I understood it all. Free, Phelim! Free and away despite everything!"

Phelim laughed harshly.

"I never thought to see the day when I'd bless a Jew, but this is it. Let me take the lead, and hide your face lest you be recognized."

So they rode, thundering along past the animal bazaar and out on the long road to the west, with none following that they could see. Past the olive groves and grazing flocks they flew, until presently they were riding out across the open, with the walls of Meknez fallen away into the distance and drowned by the rolling ground. Then Phelim drew rein.

"Between forty and fifty leagues lie ahead of us, Shamus," he exclaimed. "Best save the horses now, against need. At most, we can not cover more than half the distance today; we must take a hill track that I know to avoid the sacred city of Mulai Idris."

"And there are men ahead of us," said O'Brien.

"Safe enough," said Phelim. "On, then, at a good stout clip—push hard before the heat of the day, then rest an hour or so. What's that ahead?"

"Horsemen, and the ones we wot of. We've overtaken them."

"Then on, and get it done with," exclaimed Phelim. "Gallop when I give the word, and keep your face down."

They pressed on, rapidly overtaking a clump of horsemen ahead, the same troop they had seen leaving Meknez. Aware of the two riders, these halted and blocked the road, but Phelim urged his horse into a gallop and drove straight at them, screaming hoarsely and holding aloft the vellum with the golden seal of Ismail. The troop parted hastily, opened the way for the supposed messengers, let them through and on their way. Phelim laughed wildly and kept up his mad pace until a turn of the road shut them from sight, and reined in with an exultant look.

"Now we're free indeed, Shamus—and scarce a blow struck. So on with you, and sing your heart out if ye will!"

Once away from the city, they met few or none upon the road, and those few hurriedly fled from the sight of them. Men who rode horses were too apt to be emissaries of Ismail, who seized whatever they desired in all directions; and the Arabs had long since learned to dread the black man who oppressed them so savagely with his black legions.

So the long leagues fell behind, hour after hour, with the thatched huts and the little walled farms, fortified against Berber raids, and ever closer drew the sea with its blessed promise of friends and safety. Noon came and passed, and they rested the horses for an hour by a bubbling brook in a deep ravine, then took up the road again with Mulai Idris well behind them and the *bled*, the upland farming country, stretching away ahead to the hills and the forest of Marmora's giant oaks. In this journeying they learned each of the other's life during the past years, bridging the deep gulf that lay between as best they might.

A wild and fierce exultation filled O'Brien as he rode, with only the memory of the smiling face of the unknown

woman to dim his exhilaration. Ahead lay action, prompt and sharp, at Salé; thanks to Phelim's knowledge of Arabic and the seal of Ismail, they could pass all barriers unhindered, obtain a sloop, sail out and meet the *Kestrel* and St. Rocher. The evil land lay behind them, the open sea ahead . . .

"Shamus!" It was an hour yet to sunset when the voice of Phelim cut in upon his musings. "Three men riding toward us—mules, not horses. I see the glitter of arms."

O'Brien could see it also, for the sun had banished the rain clouds long since and now hung hot and red in the western sky. Three riders, no more, and a glitter of steel on the road. Phelim, who had an eagle's eye, soon discerned more.

"Two of them garrison Spahis—from Rabat or Salé, no doubt. But the third—"

"Lord save us!" exclaimed O'Brien, staring. "I know that figure, lad—aye, no doubt of it. The man I told you of—the slave, Will Dowling. He went to Salé with St. Rocher; what the devil is he doing here?"

"Heading back for Meknez, by the looks of it. Do you speak with him, while I talk with the Spahis."

The riders met. The two Spahis, both black men, gaped at sight of Ismail's seal, then kissed it reverently, held it to their foreheads, and fell into talk with Phelim. O'Brien pushed on past them to where Will Dowling waited—a shaggy man, still in Moorish garb, a slave here for seven years ere O'Brien won his freedom.

"Well," said O'Brien softly. "Ye know me not, Will Dowling?"

The other started violently, blinked at him, then checked wild words that came to his lips. He glanced at the two Spahis, and fumbled in his breast.

"You, master!" he rejoined. "Here, St. Rocher sent me wi' this writing for ye, and a happy man I am it's no return to Meknez for me! There's the devil's own news—but read it for yourself."

O'Brien took the folded paper, opened it, read St. Rocher's neat French script. For a moment his head drooped; the bitterness of utter despair, dismay, hopelessness, smote him like a sword and weighed him down. Then he found Phelim gripping his arm and pointing as he spoke.

"Shamus!" As O'Brien turned, the two Spahis whirled their horses about and set off at a gallop the way they had come. "Hark, Shamus! There's a kaid and fifty horsemen back on the road half a league—I've sent those two Spahis to order them to join us. They take me for a special messenger of Ismail, d'ye mind? I've ordered 'em to ride on with us to Salé—faith, we'll reach there like princes!"

"Little good it'll do us," said O'Brien, and held out the paper. "Read this—from St. Rocher."

But Phelim refused the message.

"I've forgot English writing—what does it say?"

O'Brien read it, and his voice all but faltered with bitterness on the words that sealed their doom.

"Jack:

I send our friend to warn you. The *Kestrel* was brought in to Salé today by two galleys; they caught her unawares. Half our men are dead. They say the others will be chained as rowers on the big galley here, which leaves in a few days on cruise. I can do nothing. The Moors laugh at me and are stripping the ship clean as I write. Am near rid of the fever—"

The other two stared at him, and under their gaze his head came up, and the shadow of his old gay smile twisted his lips.

"When all's lost, there's but one thing to do, lads. So let's get about doing it at once."

"Aye, all's lost," said Will Dowling dejectedly. "The ship taken, the men gone, no way of getting clear o' this cursed land. And the Moors at Salé ha' turned against us, too. Then what's the one thing to do, master?"

O'Brien laughed, leaned over in the saddle, and clapped him lustily on the shoulder.

"Fight like the devil!"

THE twin cities of Rabat and Salé, homes of the Barbary rovers, were in the full blast of activity, for April was drawing near and it was the harvest season. When the Moors were expelled from Spain in 1609, men from the town of Hornachos had settled here, and ever since had wreaked a dire vengeance on Christians.

Now the shipyards were emptied, women and old men manned the walls, and the galleys of the corsairs combed the seas to the coasts of Europe and Newfoundland. Within the space of three weeks, above twenty English ships alone had been brought in; captive ships crowded the length of the Rougreg River, others were anchored inside the bar or had been hauled ashore. Droves of Christian slaves had been dispatched to Meknez. Merchants had flocked here from every part of Morocco, and the great open space within the Rabat walls was crowded with tents and bazaars, while others had been set up outside the walls.

St. Rocher, whose title of ambassador gained him fair treatment, was walking the high battlements of the *kasbah,* a prey to sharp anxiety. He had heard nothing from O'Brien. Down below him lay the *Kestrel,* a sorry ruin, stripped of gear, her guns being hauled ashore on the Salé side. Almost beside her lay the greater of the two galleys which had brought her in—the only corsair ship now in harbor, held here for certain repairs. The crew of the *Kestrel* had been shifted into her bodily, what remained of them, to replace her dead rowers; two days more and she would be plying forth again to quest new prey.

Departing to Meknez, St. Rocher and O'Brien had left friends here; now these were gone. In the interval of slow travel and fever, heads had fallen. The new pasha was a Spanish renegade, admiral of the corsair fleet, and St. Rocher found his own position a parlous one, despite his letters from Ismail.

A stir in the long, straight Street of the Consuls below drew his attention. This street ran the full length of the wall beside the river to the eastern gate, and up its paved slope rode a troop of horsemen shouting the name of Ismail and plying relentless whips to clear the way. St. Rocher gazed down as they came to the wide space before the Gate of the Oudaiah, below him, and left their sweat-white horses; but a better eye than his would have failed to recognize any one he knew beneath those baggy, travel stained *djellaba.* He turned away and sought his own quarters off the citadel gardens, with heavy heart.

Some few moments later the renegade commanding his guard sauntered in—a fawning, cowardly fellow, a Tuscan slave formerly.

"Señor, you are wanted in audience by the pasha," he said, and grinned. "His Excellency is in trouble, and because of you. And if you have a gold piece, señor, I have something to trade for it."

"Yes?" St. Rocher gave him a look, decided to risk the gold piece, and in exchange received a folded paper, which he opened eagerly. Upon it were four Irish words written in English script:

Lamh laidir an uachtar

"O'Brien's motto—The Strong Hand Above!" A sudden laugh came to the saturnine lips of St. Rocher. Instantly he was transformed, and with a dancing flame in his dark eyes, he flung a second gold piece at the renegade and caught up his sword belt. "Ready, then?"

In the huge open chamber beneath the glorious Merinide gateway, the pasha held audience, and his dark, passionate features were uneasy. His guards stood around him, but facing him were the three men who had just arrived with a troop of horse for escort, with the ring of Ismail for token, with letters bearing Ismail's golden seal for authority. To those letters the pasha bowed, while the leader of the three addressed him in sonorous Arabic. St. Rocher, entering, met the flashing glance of O'Brien under the *djellab* hood, and stood tense, while an

interpreter murmured what was passing before his eyes.

"Pasha Abdallah, Slave of God!" cried Phelim. "I am named Ali, and I bear the greetings of Ismail, the Sword of Allah; may his name be exalted among the faithful! It has come to the ears of the master of the world, who knows all things, that you have taken a ship of the infidels and that instead of sending her crew to Meknez as is commanded, you have placed them aboard one of your galleys. If this be true, you shall answer for it. Know you not that all infidel slaves are the property of the seed of Idris?"

"By the beard of the Prophet, whose name be blessed!" returned the pasha. "What is done, is done, and if there be liars in the world, what is that to me? It is true that a ship was taken, and as is the custom, I have put her men aboard a galley to replace those who were slain at the oars. To this end I hold the authority of our Lord Ismail himself."

"That may be," said Phelim, with a harsh, sardonic laugh. "But this ship belonged to ambassadors and held the safe conduct of the sharif."

"That is not so at all," said the pasha bluntly.

Phelim held up his vellum bearing the seal of Ismail.

"Look you, Abdallah ben Aisha!" he exclaimed angrily. "Here is my authority, and it goes far. We go aboard this galley to question these men, and I desire this Christian ambassador to accompany us, that we may have his testimony, for full report on this matter must be sent to Meknez before set of sun. Hear and obey!"

"I hear and obey," murmured the pasha dutifully. "As Allah liveth, who am I but the slave of Idris? An escort shall be ready in half an hour, and boats prepared to take you aboard. Meantime, refresh yourselves and rest."

"Gladly," said Phelim. "And while we wait, give orders that those slaves aboard the galley be released from their irons to await us and to be numbered, for such is the will of Ismail, of the seed of Idris!"

The pasha gave the order, and meditated what bribe to offer this gaunt, harsh man, who was apparently a renegade like himself.

St. Rocher quietly moved about, humming a little under his breath, and presently found himself at the elbow of O'Brien. The latter spoke softly, while Phelim held the pasha in talk and slaves served sherbet and cakes.

"It's nip and tuck, comrade; all hell's loose behind us. When we get aboard that galley, we must clear her and go, or we're lost."

"Good," said St. Rocher. "But it can't be done, Jack. She's under the fort's guns and has men quartered aboard. If we could wait until night—"

"Can't wait an hour, man! Even this delay may pinch us. There, Phelim's hurrying him up—my brother, Jack. Faith, you should have seen Ismail when I knocked him asprawl! Watch yourself, now; be ready."

Phelim played his part well, and if Will Dowling were recognized as St. Rocher's companion, and given blame for bearing the news to Meknez, little honest Will cared. The pasha bade his unwelcome guests Godspeed and sent them down to the water gate with an escort, and there boats were ready to take them out to the galley. Now Phelim's part was done, and the rest was in the hand of O'Brien, to win or lose.

Yet, as they drew out toward the galley, O'Brien perceived how desperate was their hope, how all but impossible. The galley lay anchored inside the bar, under the guns of the little fort on the rocks, with the great gun platform directly above her. Alongside her were swarms of small craft, for she was of large size, with high poop and two furled lateen sails, one to a mast, and carried six small guns, three to a side.

Aboard her was a great crowd of Arabs and Moors, soldiers and ship's complement and outfitters. In her waist were some forty of O'Brien's crew, their irons

being knocked off; not a few of them were hurt or wounded. What this handful of naked, unarmed men could do against five times their number, was doubtful.

"Thank heaven the tide's on the ebb," murmured O'Brien, and touched Phelim's arm. "Your task is to cut the for'ard cable as soon as may be. Will Dowling, slash through the after hawser. Lose no time, either of you."

Next moment, they were at her ladder in the waist.

Her captain, a swarthy Portuguese renegade, waited to receive them; and as he came to the deck, O'Brien saw that the least delay or suspicion would be fatal. The only chance of success was to strike like a thunderbolt. He flung back the hood of his *djellab*, then shook off the clumsy garment completely. His gathered men had sighted St. Rocher, and now a low growl arose from them as they saw his face. O'Brien caught at his rapier.

"Up and at 'em, lads!" he called sharply, and drove the long blade through the Portuguese.

St. Rocher's sword flickered out, and there was a moment of utter, stark madness as steel snicked home and men died, and those two naked blades ran red. The Arabs, indeed, thought they had to deal with very madmen, and gave back in sharp terror from the two. Then the cowed, naked slaves wakened into life, and went leaping and bursting out among the Moors, snatching at weapons, smiting with fists, bringing men down here and there. Some of them met death, but more gained weapons and fell to work with them.

"*Allah! Allah akbar!*" rose the yell, and in upon the press drove a mass of the corsair's crew, as O'Brien's voice gathered his men to meet them.

Here was the instant of crisis. Overboard had dived the outfitters and workers in hasty panic; some score of the Arab crew, hard fighting men all, swept down upon O'Brien to end the matter swiftly while others gathered behind them; from the walls and battlements above rose a swelling uproar of yells and shouts.

O'Brien was laughing as he fought, meeting the onrush with steady rapier, while St. Rocher stood beside him with deadly steel playing in and out. The rush broke against them, and then man after man of the buccaneers smashed headlong into the fight with knife and scimitar, ax and hammer, Irish yelps and English cheers echoing up together. The mêlèe became stubborn, unyielding. The yellow hair of O'Brien had vanished now; he was down, with St. Rocher plying desperate steel above him—then up again, blood streaking his face, the rapier lunging like a tongue of death. Back they were driven, their naked men forced into a mass.

"Treachery!" The wild Arab yell shrilled up from poop and stem. "Treachery! By Allah, we are betrayed! We are adrift!"

It was the voice of Phelim, and to it Will Dowling added his roar. O'Brien knew not what was said, but its effect was instant. The corsairs broke ranks, stared about, saw that the galley was indeed cut loose.

"Strike 'em!" blared O'Brien, and flung forward. "St. Rocher! Get the canvas out!"

A blast from the poop—Phelim had found a swivel gun there, loaded, and held a coal to it from a charcoal brazier heating a tar bucket. The load of slugs tore through the mass of Arabs, broke them. The naked slaves, with weapons to spare now, hurled themselves on the dark men, scattered them, drove them to bow and poop—and on the poop was Phelim with a crimsoned blade, taking the vengeance that had bided twelve long years, and roaring Arabic curses on them so that they knew not which was friend or foe.

Now it was no longer a battle, but a slaughter of those who stood, until figures went plunging overboard, swimming for the shore and the drifting small craft, and O'Brien cleared the last of them from

the bow. Already the naked men were swarming aloft, unfurling the two sails to catch the offshore wind, sending the galley out toward the bar.

A crash and thunder of guns, and she shook from stem to stern as the great shot from above ripped into her, hulled her in poop and waist, ploughed up her deck. A splinter knocked O'Brien headlong, ripped his arm from shoulder to elbow. He staggered up and made his way aft, his voice rallying the men to the forgotten oars. These were put out, and as he came to the poop, with Will Dowling wrapping a cloth about his hurt, came a second discharge of guns above. This time the shot passed overhead, but the rigging was spared.

Not a cable's length from the little fort below the great rock, now—and smoke spurted from the five culverins there, and again the galley reeled, but her masts held, and the canvas was bellying out. A scrape, a shudder, and she was across the bar, with O'Brien aiding Phelim at the helm.

"Down, all hands!" Well O'Brien guessed what was coming now, and there was no evading it. His voice rose in a shrill yell. "Down! Down! Down with ye, Phelim—"

Phelim grunted scornfully. O'Brien tripped him, sent him sprawling, held the helm with his one good arm—and then it came. The guns up above on the great platform vomited flame and smoke in a roaring thunder of brazen throat. Grape and bullets and slugs came down upon the galley in a blast of death, ripping through the canvas, peppering her decks, striking down man after man.

Standing there at the helm, O'Brien shook the hair and blood out of his eyes, lifted his crimsoned arm, shook his fist back at the guns above.

"The Strong Hand Above!" he shouted exultantly.

And she heeled over a little and ran out to the westward and the sword rim of the ocean that lay across the horizon —a riven, splintered thing, wounded and sore hurt, but peopled by men who babbled laughter over their wounds and counted freedom from Ismail well won at the price.

For such, indeed, was the will of Allah.

OBEDIENT

By

J. D. NEWSOM

IT WAS the end of a perfect meal. Through a haze of cigar smoke Lieutenant Ormrod beamed upon Lieutenant Hill. Hill was smiling too, a dreamy smile which made him look almost seraphic. Their cheeks were flushed and their eyes were somewhat glassy, but they were not drunk, for officers of his Majesty's Royal Field Artillery never drink to excess. They were merely feeling superlatively mellow.

Full fed and contented, they leaned back in their chairs and toyed with the stems of their cognac glasses. From time to time, when their emotions became uncontrollable, they hiccoughed in a genteel manner, placing the tips of their fingers over their lips.

It was eight o'clock at night. The Restaurant de l'Ecrevisse, most exclusive of eating places in Amiens, was crowded to the doors. Civilians were few and far between. The military element outnumbered them ten to one. There were French officers in horizon-blue and Englishmen in khaki, dusky Portuguese warriors in gray-blue and kilted Scots, not to mention hatchet faced Australians and pink cheeked New Zealanders.

And in among these gallant soldiers, come from the far corners of the earth to fight for civilization, there were many young and alluring maidens attired according to the fashion standards of the Spring of 1916. Their presence added greatly to the charm of the Ecrevisse and promoted the sale of champagne at ninety-five francs a bottle.

Ormrod and Hill, however, sat alone with their thoughts and their Normandin cognac. They were celebrating a great event: Their battery, the 114th Trench Mortar Battery, which had been

SERVANTS

A Story of No Man's Land

passed out of the training school with high marks, was under orders to proceed to the firing line the next morning.

Both men had seen service before with regular field artillery units. At Ypres and Arras they had gained first hand knowledge of warfare, but they had not found the experience conclusive. Like Oliver Twist, they wanted more. When a call for volunteers to staff the newly organized trench mortar batteries had been sent out, they had been among the first to send in their applications.

Ormrod, the senior, was in command of the battery: four guns firing sixty-pound bombs shaped like footballs mounted on a steel rod two feet long. He was an old man of twenty-five, rapidly approaching senility. Hill was a veteran of twenty-three. Neither of them had any illusions left about themselves or about life. They were so disabused and cynical that they preferred a good dinner, with the right wines and the right cigars, to the company of the most fascinating woman in Amiens—or so they said. Women, they had decided, were a dreadful bore.

Ormrod swirled the cognac around in his glass, inhaled the fumes, said "Ah!" and allowed a few drops of the amber colored liquid to flow on to his tongue.

"Superb!" he declared.

"The best ever," sighed Hill. "1874 must have been a good year for cognacs."

Several minutes went by while, in silence, they smelled, sipped and stared at the contents of their glasses.

"You know, old chap," Ormrod remarked, trying to put his cigar into his mouth and failing repeatedly, "you know, there is something I must really

tell you. It's been on my jolly old mind all evening. I hope you won't think me a bounder because of it. In this case my Brish—I mean British, y'know —I mean my Brish reserve must go by the boards. I feel an irresis—irresistible desire to speak out."

Hill squared his shoulders and threw back his head.

"Shoot!" he urged. "You're my battery commander. You can say—" he swept his hand across the table—"anything! Posilutely anything, Officer Commanding the 114th Trench Mortar Battery. I'm listening!"

The back of his hand came in contact with a glass containing the dregs of the burgundy they had imbibed with the *rognons sauce madère*. The glass overturned, spilling the wine into an ashtray.

"That's a good omen," chuckled Hill. "A direct hit with the first shot. You were saying, Officer Commanding? Excush the interruption."

"Certainly! Certainly!" Ormrod said magnanimously. "A minor matter, my dear chap. I was about to remark that I am sure we are going to get along together splendidly. I feel I have a second-in-command I can depend upon at all times."

"You bet. It's the best battery in the Fourth Army."

"I have watched you," Ormrod went on. "At first I wasn't so sure. An American, you know—rather dubious about you, old fellow. Didn't know what to expect, what? But you're all right, Hill. You're top hole. And I want to tell you I'd rather have you with me than some of the young pipsqueaks they're sending out nowadays. We understand one another, you and I."

"That's it," agreed Hill. "Perfect understanding. You're not like some of the Limeys I've come across. They give me a pain in the neck. That's one reason why I transferred to trench mortars. I was with B127. The major's name was Selsby-Flount. Lord, what a lad he was! I told him where he got off before I left."

"Quite right." Ormrod nodded. "What I like about you, Hill, old chap, is that you attend to your work and don't bother about women and—ah—things like that. I'm proud to have you with me."

"'S mutual. Battery Commander, the way I look at it is this; this war is a serioush prop'sition, a titanic struggle against barbarism and oppression." He burst out laughing. "Let's have another drink. We need it."

AND AS he turned to beckon the waiter he beheld a vision so wonderful and so startling that it held him spellbound.

A girl had just entered the restaurant. At a leisurely pace she was threading her way among the tables, glancing first to one side, then to the other as she hunted for a possible meal ticket. To the uninitiated she may have looked like a great many other girls, neither tall nor short, with a funny little nose, a wide mouth and bright, inquisitive eyes. To Hill, however, she was perfection.

He forgot all about the waiter. Pushing back his chair, he cried—

"Ninette!"

It didn't sound at all like, "Waiter, bring me two cognacs."

Ormrod raised his head. A startling change came over him also. His face was wreathed in smiles.

"Ninette!" he exclaimed in exactly the same tone of voice Hill had used.

"What's that?" snapped Hill. "You know her?"

"Do I know Ninette!" Ormrod exulted. "Lord bless my soul, my dear fellow, I've known her for years. Now, please, old fellow, I must ask you—"

Elbowing Hill aside, he hurried toward the girl.

"You!" he said in his abominable French. "Here! At Amiens!"

A slight frown appeared between her eyes.

"You remember me," he went on. "It

was at Boulogne. Last March. I am Lieutenant Ormrod, *vous savez.* William Ormrod of the artillery. Today I command my own battery, yes."

By that time Hill had caught hold of her other hand.

"What good fortune brings you here?" he burbled. "Remember the fun we had that night at Le Havre? That aviator, Kingsley of the Lafayette Escadrille, introduced us. Come on and sit down. I want to talk to you."

"I spoke first," Ormrod pointed out. "Is it not so, Ninette?"

"I saw you first," protested Hill. "As soon as you entered the restaurant I recognized you."

"Of course I remember you—both of you, Ninette laughed "I met you—" she smiled at Hill—"at Boulogne—"

"Le Havre! We dined at—"

"That is exactly what I said. And your friend, I encountered him at Boulogne. My little cabbages, you may offer me a glass of vermouth and, perhaps, something to eat. I am starving."

She sat down beside Hill. The smell of the perfume she used, coming on top of the cognac, made him feel slightly dizzy.

"Did I tell you that I now command a battery of four pieces?" inquired Ormrod, trying to hold her hand while she tried to read the menu card. "Lieutenant Hill is my subordinate, my assistant."

"It is only a battery of *crapouillots,*" Hill informed her. "Trench guns."

"But so very dangerous," murmured Ninette. "You are heroes, is it not? I think I could eat a little lobster thermidor, and a wing of chicken, yes, and some strawberries Chantilly."

The head waiter hurried forward to take the order.

"And how about something to drink?" suggested Ormrod. "Half a bottle of champagne for instance?"

Hill laughed raucously.

"Half a bottle! *Quelle blague!* We'll have a whole bottle, won't we, Ninette? We shall drink to your bright blue eyes. Let's have a whole bottle."

"Anything you say, my infants." Ninette shrugged. "I came in on the Paris train not an hour ago, and I have the hunger of a wolf. It is so nice to meet old friends again," she went on, laying a hand on Hill's wrist. "How well I recall that day at Le Touquet—"

"Le Havre!"

"Naturally! How stupid of me. Le Havre. You have not changed at all. You're as handsome as ever, my little William."

"My name's Andrew," Hill said patiently. "Andrew F. Hill."

"You are thinking of me," Ormrod broke in. "I am sometimes called William."

"Say, were you at Le Havre?" snorted Hill. "You were not. She's my girl. Don't butt in."

Ormrod looked supercilious and very, very English.

"Ruhlly!" he drawled. "Why, my dear fellow, I was under the impression you were not int'rested in women, what?"

"Ninette isn't like other women," Hill retorted. "She's as straight as a die. If you knew her as well as I do."

"I know her bettah! Ever so much bettah!"

Ninette was pecking away industriously at her lobster thermidor. She tried to restore peace.

"And so you are in command of a battery!" she said to Ormrod. "It is *magnifique!* I compliment you. And you have an admirable second in command."

"That's right," applauded Hill. "Tell him how wonderful I am, Ninette. Strictly in confidence, I don't mind telling you I run the battery—what there is of it. Friend Willy is a mere figurehead, the frosting on the *gateau,* if you know what I mean."

"Quite," agreed Ormrod. "Quite. My dear chap, may I remind you that it is getting rather late? Don't you think it about time you were pushing along?"

Hill turned white.

"I don't understand," he confessed. "What are you driving at?"

A brigade commander, hauling an unruly subaltern over the coals, could not have spoken more crushingly than Ormrod when he said:

"Mr. Hill, it is customary in the British army for an officer to be present when the roll is called. Tomorrow we leave for the trenches. It is your duty to see that there are no absentees and that our material is ready to move. I am sorry, my dear chap, to have to draw your attention to such routine matters."

"For crying out loud!" exclaimed Hill, round eyed with astonishment. "What's come over you?"

"Listen," begged Ninette, whose womanly intuition warned her that a storm was brewing. "I have a great surprise for you. I came here from Paris because—"

They did not hear a word she said.

"I am giving you an order!" snapped Ormrod, pounding the table with a clenched fist. "Do you understand what I am saying?"

"And you know what you can do with your order, don't you?" said Hill. "We're off parade and don't you forget it. You're a bum sport, trying to chase me all the way back to Mouliens so's you can have Ninette all to yourself. But you're out of luck. You can't bulldoze me."

"The lobster is delicious," Ninette assured them. "Now please be reasonable, my little cabbages. There is nothing for you to fight about. Not a thing! Let us be good friends."

Hers was a still, small voice speaking in a wilderness.

"You insolent puppy!" sputtered Ormrod. "You seem to forget that I am your commanding officer. I am ordering you to proceed to Mouliens at once, to—"

"—to tuck the gunners in their little cow barns," Hill completed the sentence. "Alas, esteemed Commanding Officer, I ain't going to go. No, sir, not nohow."

"Mr. Hill, are you out of your mind?" cried Ormrod, asserting the full weight of his authority. "I order you to go!"

Hill chose to disregard the order. He turned to Ninette and gazed into her eyes.

"I am glad you like the lobster," he said yearningly.

"I do not like it so well now," she complained. "You are very rude—both of you. Do you think it is nice for me to sit here and listen to you squabble in English? Fight in French, if you must fight."

He winked at her.

"Ah, the English! Strange people, Ninette! Very peculiar people. They are so childish, yes, no? Tell him to go take a walk. It's too stuffy in here for him. Tell him he's spoiling your dinner. His new job has gone to his head, poor devil."

"Mr. Hill," protested Ormrod, "will you kindly listen to me, sir!"

"Honored Commanding Officer," Hill replied, "you can go to hell before I'll obey that order. Ninette—"

HE WAS cut short by the mighty howl of a siren. The noise swept over the city in waves, rising, falling, rising again. Air raid. The lights in the restaurant went out. A woman screamed.

In the darkness the headwaiter could be heard calling:

"One moment, if you please! A little patience, messieurs, dames."

A match crackled. The yellow flame of a candle threw highlights on the headwaiter's perspiring forehead.

"This way to the cellar," he chanted. "This way, all those who wish to take shelter in the cellar."

Few people answered the summons, not more than a dozen. Most of the customers kept their seats. Bursts of laughter came out of the darkness, shrill squeals, and the resonant sound of kisses.

"All right, Ninette?" shouted Hill, turning toward the girl.

And as he did so something shot past his face. The edge of a cuff brushed against his nose.

"Let that girl alone," ordered the voice of Lieutenant Ormrod. "Don't you dare touch that girl!"

On the outskirts of the city a battery of antiaircraft guns crashed into action. The windows shook.

"You louse!" cried Hill. "I'll show you where you get off! Ninette? Where are you? Ninette!"

A hand clutched at his shoulder, thrust him aside. He stumbled over his own feet and sat down on the edge of a champagne bucket. Ice water flooded his riding breeches.

"Ormrod," he swore, "if it's the last thing I do on earth, I'm going to tan your hide. You lousy, doublecrossing Limey!"

All the guns in and around Amiens were firing at top speed. The low ceilinged room vibrated like a drum, and all the while the drone of airplane engines grew louder and louder. Like a gust of hail, spent shrapnel bullets and shell fragments rattled on the cobble stones in the street outside the restaurant. Tiles crashed into the roadway.

"They're dead overhead," some one said with unconvincing casualness.

Thereupon a second group of customers left their places and hurried on tiptoe toward the service door leading to the cellar steps. All conversation had stopped. Nobody at that particular moment was kissing anybody else.

The headwaiter, who had weathered many an air raid, stood close to the front entrance, holding the lighted taper high above his head, ready to thwart any attempt on the part of his distinguished clientele to depart before they had paid their bills.

"Antoine," drawled a tired voice, "couldn't you let me have a candle of my own? I can't see to eat this confounded pigeon, and it's almost cold."

"In just a moment," promised the headwaiter. "As soon as the staff returns from the cellar, monsieur."

Waiters were conspicuous by their absence.

A large man scuttling hurriedly cellarward tripped over Hill's outstretched legs. To steady himself, the man grabbed at the edge of the table. Bottles and glasses overturned. One of the bottles was half full of Clos Vougeot 1911. The wine ran off the table and cascaded down the nape of Hill's neck. He couldn't move far, for one of his spurs was caught beneath the edge of the carpet. The things he said as the warm wine went sliding down his spine were not befitting an officer and a gentleman. Nevertheless, he said them. He used round, full bodied oaths, consigning Ormrod and the British army to the nethermost pits of hell.

Grabbing hold of the tablecloth, he tried to drag himself to his feet. The next instant an avalanche of glasses, coffee cups, lumps of sugar and silver spoons clattered about him.

A whistling, slithering shriek covered the noise he was making. It filled the whole room—a rush of sound which ended in a muffled crash as though a pile of plates had been dropped on to a tiled floor.

"The station got that one," somebody muttered.

The station, three hundred yards away, was the nerve center of the railroad system of Northern France. German bombing squadrons visited it frequently.

In the restaurant nobody stirred. Antoine stood like rock near the doorway. His white shirt front glistened in the candlelight. A woman whimpered, "*J'ai peur!*" The air was thick with the smell of tobacco smoke, perfume and cooking food.

Another shriek, another crash. Nearer. Machine guns, chattering angrily, blazed away at nothing. The antiaircraft batteries were firing as fast as they could load. Then fire alarms blared and iron shod wheels went clattering over the cobbles. Pandemonium.

Wheee! Closer that time. Louder.

Débris clattering down into the street. A splintering of glass, and an agonized voice yelling:

"An ambulance! Call an ambulance!"

The roar of engines, opened full throttle, filled the sky.

"The cellar, messieurs, dames," Antoine sang out. "It might be safer. I suggest the cellar. It is the station that is being—"

Sitting on the floor with a tablecloth draped about his shoulders, Hill saw it happen in one swift, red lit flash. The noise came afterward. The plate glass window caved inward and burst. The red plush curtains were blown straight out horizontally, as stiff as though they had been starched. Antoine stood motionless, holding the dead candle shoulder high. But Antoine had no head.

Then, as the blackness closed in, came the noise and chaos—and yet more noise as another bomb struck home fifty feet away, on the other side of the street, stripping the façade off a six-story house. There was a hiss of escaping gas.

Hill heard a man cry out:

"My legs, O God, my legs! I'm caught!"

Some one trod on his hand as he crawled toward the sound of the voice. A name flashed through his mind: Ninette. He groped about among the overturned tables and the shattered bits of crockery, hunting for the girl. He found a warm, wet thing—and his heart rose up and choked him until his sticky fingers came in contact with a leather belt and buttons.

He worked his way back to the bench by the wall, but there was no trace of Ninette. Lumps of plaster fell on to his back. The smell of gas nauseated him.

Through the dust and the smoke he saw shadowy figures struggling over smashed beams toward the street, red with the glow of burning houses.

He helped a Frenchman carry a Highlander out of the restaurant. Then he went back and helped lift a ten-inch balk off an Australian colonel's knees.

The raid was over. Searchlights swept the empty sky. An ammunition dump on the road to Bray was going up like a set piece at a fireworks display, flashing and thundering as ten thousand shells detonated a hundred at a time.

It was on his third trip into the restaurant that Hill bumped into Ormrod. The latter was helping some hysterical women over the mounds of rubbish which blocked the entrance. They glared at each other without any amenity whatsoever.

"Mr. Hill!" barked Ormrod. "*Mister* Hill!"

"Go float," said Mr. Hill. "I'm busy."

When he came out military policemen, medical officers and firemen were in charge of operations. Hill's services were no longer required. In fact, the competent authorities didn't want his services at any price.

"Wounded?" demanded a major with an M.P. brassard on his sleeve.

"No," said Hill.

"Sir to you," snapped the major. "If you are not wounded, be good enough to get out of here, sir. At once! Your uniform is a disgrace, sir."

"There's a girl—" began Hill.

"That'll do!" stormed the major. "Don't let me hear another word about these loose women, sir! Let me see your pass, sir."

Just then Lieutenant Ormrod chose to butt in.

He saluted the provost-marshal with the smartness of a guardsman, bringing his heels together with a click.

"Excuse me, sir," he said briskly. "I am the officer commanding the 114th Trench Mortar Battery. Lieutenant Hill is my subaltern. His pass is quite in order. I signed it myself, sir."

The major glanced at the stars on Ormrod's shoulder straps. He gave one grunt.

"You're none too sweet and clean yourself," he pointed out. "Let me see *your* pass. All right. Now get out of here, the pair of you."

Side by side, in silence, they trudged

down the street. A five-mile walk lay ahead of them. They did not speak until they were well out of earshot of the French sentry post on the highway to Mouliens. There was no traffic on the road, not a sound save the crunch of their boots in the dust and the whisper of the wind rippled wheat in the fields by the wayside.

At last Ormrod cleared his throat.

"Mr. Hill," he said with ominous calm, "your conduct tonight has been a revelation."

"Oh, cut it out," pleaded Hill. "Forget it. What happened to Ninette, do you know? I couldn't find her anywhere."

"I escorted her to the cellar. She suffered no harm."

"That's great."

"Quite. But you behaved like a bally rotter. Mademoiselle Ninette was very much perturbed by your lack of manners, and I," he confessed in an outburst of candor, "I had to bear the consequences of your ungentlemanly behavior. She smacked my face."

"You had it coming your way," Hill retorted. "Listen here, Ormrod."

"Sir to you, if you please. You forget yourself, Mr. Hill."

Hill stopped dead in his tracks.

"And I'm telling you as man to man, Ormrod, you're the nastiest little squirt I ever met. On parade I'll sir you blue in the face. We're not on parade. We haven't been on parade all evening. You're going to apologize for what you said just now or I'll knock you for a loop."

Ormrod forgot the dignity required of trench mortar battery commanders.

"Is that a threat?" he demanded truculently.

"Are you going to apologize or aren't you?" Hill insisted.

Too much wine and too much excitement had soured their tempers. They were spoiling for a fight. Who struck the first blow is an open question. In all probability they lashed out at the same time. Ormrod's knuckles grazed Hill's right eye. His fist landed on Ormrod's neck below the ear. After that they went at it hammer and tongs. They didn't score one clean hit out of ten, for the night was pitch dark, but the tenth when it landed did plenty of damage. Heads down, puffing, flaying the air with their arms, they lurched from one side of the road to the other.

Ormrod was the better boxer. He timed his punches with more accuracy and, when he thought of it, made good use of his left, English fashion, shooting it straight out from the shoulder.

Hill ran into that left half a dozen times. It cut his lips and bloodied his nose, and it made him mad. Instead of carrying the fight to Ormrod, he waited for him flat footed in the middle of the road. Ormrod ducked, dodged and danced about on his toes. Finally he decided to close in. He landed one more left, then Hill let him have it, a pile-driver on the point of the jaw. He went down and he stayed down for the better part of a minute.

"Feeling better?" inquired Hill when his enemy revived. "Can you walk?"

Another minute elapsed while Ormrod held his head between his fists and groaned. At last he stood up. Without a word he tottered down the road.

"Want any help?" Hill suggested.

"Damn you, no!" said Ormrod. "I can walk. I prefer to walk alone." He spoke with great difficulty, for his jaw was painful. "This will go no further, but kindly bear in mind that, hereafter, I want no social dealings with you. None! Good night."

"Suit yourself," grunted Hill. "I should worry."

And they went on toward Mouliens, Ormrod on the right hand side of the road, Hill on the left.

THE Germans were plastering Maricourt with everything they had. The dugout shook beneath the impact of 5.9's. Bits of mortar bounced on the table. A film of fine dust dimmed the light

of the kerosene lamp which flickered and smoked at each detonation.

Captain Bramwell looked up at the vaulted ceiling.

"Safe?" he inquired.

"You bet!" Hill assured him. "Best dugout in Maricourt. It used to be the cellar of the brewery manager's house, so they say."

A tremendous explosion extinguished the light, and a volley of stones, sand bags and bits of wood hurtled down the cellar steps.

When he stopped coughing Hill removed the lamp chimney and held a match to the wick.

"Right smack on top of us," he declared, "and not a brick knocked out of place. How about a shot in the arm, Skipper? Scotch or ration rum. That's all we've got."

Bramwell was fanning himself with his steel helmet.

"Scotch. Rather warm spot, this. I had the devil's own time coming up the valley."

"Tough going," Hill admitted. "Too much tear gas to suit me. Do you like yours straight or otherwise?"

His hand shook ever so slightly and his face was gray. His right elbow stuck out through a hole in the sleeve of his mud stained tunic.

"Did you get yesterday's report?" he went on, sliding a glass across the table. "Four killed, three wounded. One gun blown higher'n a kite. A minnie landed in the pit."

Bramwell gulped down a mouthful of whisky and wiped the back of his hand over his lips.

"You'll have to carry on with three guns," he declared. "The final artillery preparation starts sometime tonight. That's what I came to talk over with you. By the way—" he glanced around the cellar—"where's Ormrod?"

"Cruising around. He's having breakfast at Rifle Brigade headquarters. That's all I know."

The corners of Bramwell's mouth twitched suspiciously.

"Still billing and cooing, you two? I'm glad I don't have to live with you. By Jove, I am."

Their feud was the standing joke of the division. They were no longer on speaking terms. Ormrod scribbled his orders on bits of paper. An orderly relayed them to Hill. It was a slow and painful means of communication which infuriated them both.

They ate at different hours, but, off duty, they had to live and sleep in the same dugout. For want of some better means of expressing their feelings they insulted each other copiously at the end of their official correspondence. Ormrod objected to Hill's "foul and filthy habit of paring his nails with a jack-knife," and sent him a book entitled "Etiquette in the Mess—A Guide to Good Manners for Young Officers", by Colonel Sir John Willoughby-Pringle.

Hill retaliated by suggesting that a new toothbrush was an essential adjunct to cleanliness, and that brilliantine was not a substitute for an occasional shampoo. To even the score he sent Ormrod a jar of anti-vermin ointment, some sandpaper and a wire brush together with detailed instructions as to their proper use.

Notwithstanding these delightful habits—because of them perhaps—they went about their business of blowing up machine gun emplacements and wrecking listening posts with murderous enthusiasm. Too much enthusiasm. They made life unbearable for the infantrymen who had to bear the brunt of the German retaliation. Morning, noon and night, the sector was in an uproar.

Hill gave his shoulders a shrug.

"Do you think I want to live with that baboon?" he snorted. "He sleeps with his mouth wide open. That's the latest development. I dropped a sock into it last night. I thought I was headed straight for court-martial!"

"You're a pair of damn fools," declared Bramwell. "However, it's none of my business. How long is he going to be? Any idea?"

"Not the foggiest. I guess he'll stay put until the bombardment slows up."

Another direct hit made the dugout rock. Before the commotion subsided Ormrod came down the cellar steps. He came fast. He was rather breathless and one half of his face was smeared with dirt. Mud dripped off his hands and knees. He looked startled and careworn, but the look vanished as soon as he caught sight of Captain Bramwell, the divisional trench mortar officer.

"Cheerio!" he called out in an unsteady voice. "Lively mornin', what? Have a drink, sir? Scotch or ration rum?"

He did not condescend to notice Hill.

Bramwell shook his head.

"Thanks, Ormrod. I've just had one. Come over here. There's something I want to show you."

"Is it—er—confidential? Shall I clear the dugout?"

"Your private squabbles do not concern me," snapped Bramwell, while Hill smiled triumphantly. "I'm talking to both of you. Now look here—" he drew a set of aerial photographs from a dispatch case—"this is the Y-Wood sector, south of the Peronne road. You know the ground?"

"Of course, sir."

"All right. Let's check it with your map to avoid confusion. It's important."

Hill produced a map and spread it out on the table.

"There you are," Bramwell went on. "The German trenches running through square A-46. You see that dark strip in front of the front line; that's wire, a belt twenty feet thick. It's got to be cut between now and three o'clock tomorrow morning. The artillery can't reach it. The lines are too close together. Those sixty-pounders of yours with instantaneous fuses will do the work very nicely. It's your job."

The two lieutenants stared hard at the photograph. The belt of wire was unmistakable; it showed up black and thick against the chalky soil pitted with shell holes. Behind the wire there was a network of trenches leading back toward Y-Wood.

"Lord bless my soul!" cried Ormrod. "I know it's our job. I thought the wire was cut. We put a hundred rounds into it yesterday."

"There's the photograph," said Bramwell, jabbing the document with his forefinger. "It was taken at six this morning. Those, I imagine, are your shell craters." He pointed to a pock marked zone along the fringe of the wire. "Fifty feet short of your target."

Ormrod chewed his lower lip.

"The ground slopes away," he explained. I can't get direct observation on that confounded wire from any point of our lines. We had to shoot by the map."

"Fifty short," repeated Bramwell. "It's got to be cut. Quick! When the infantry go forward they'll need a clear passage. Y-Wood is the hinge of the German support lines. It's our first objective. I want you to get to work as soon as possible and make a clean sweep of that wire. Let me know as soon as it's done."

He slid the photographs back into his dispatch case and stood up.

"Couldn't we have airplane cooperation?" inquired Ormrod. "If they'd observe for us long enough to put us on the target."

"Airplane cooperation for trench mortars!" cried Bramwell. "Certainly not. Don't be ridiculous. You saw the photo; you're fifty feet short. Send somebody out after dark to make sure every last scrap of wire is down. I don't want any guesswork. It's vital. And don't report back to me until you're positive there's a three hundred yard gap as bare as the palm of your hand."

He put on his tin hat and slipped the strap under his chin.

"Another spot before you go, Skipper?" suggested Hill.

"Sorry, I've got to see Martindale. There's a lot of wire uncut up his way too. I'll be back at headquarters be-

fore five tonight. Send down a runner the minute you're through."

A covey of shells burst somewhere close at hand. The lamp flickered. Bramwell lingered at the foot of the stairs.

"Well," he said at last, "here goes!"

He went up the steps three at a time. As he passed out of sight a 5.9 struck the house. Punched clean out of the vaulted ceiling a brick crashed down upon the lamp, smashing it to smithereens. Kerosene fumes pervaded the dugout. Ormrod switched on an electric torch, but a thick pall of dust and smoke blinded him.

For the first time in weeks, he spoke:

"Mr. Hill," he rasped, "*what* are you waiting for? We are going into action at once. You can't skulk down here for the rest of the day."

No answer reached his ears.

Scrambling up the rubbish choked staircase toward the light of day, he found Hill waiting for him behind the mound of sandbags which were supposed to protect the entrance to the dugout.

And at Hill's feet lay Bramwell, stone dead. Trickling down his right eye lid, a drop of blood no larger than a pin head showed where a tiny fragment of flying steel had pierced his skull and entered his brain.

Hill tore a page from his field service memorandum book and handed it to Ormrod. It read:

> Your contemptible inefficiency is the cause of this. You are not fit to command a squad of scavengers. Had the wire been cut Captain Bramwell would still be alive. I am going to fall the men in and proceed to the gun emplacements. There is enough ammunition on hand up there for this shoot.
>
> I beg to remain, sir,
> Your obedient servant,
> —A. F. HILL, LT., R. F. A.

Ormrod crumpled the note in his fist. His face grew livid. Snatching out his own notebook, he scribbled:

> You swine, the responsibility is equally divided. You are a cheap liar and a moral coward . . .

He had to stop and crouch behind the sandbags when a shell came whistling down out of the sky. It burst among the ruins of a cottage opposite the brewery, hurling a geyser-like spout of dirt and smoke and metal high into the air. Ormrod resumed:

> Tonight, immediately after sunset, you will go out on patrol and inspect the effects of our fire on the wire in front of Y-Wood, in map-square A/46. The life of thousands of men will depend upon the accuracy of your survey, damn you.
>
> I beg to remain, sir,
> Your obedient servant,
> —WILLIAM ORMROD, LT.
> O. C. 114 T. M. B.

ON BOTH banks of the Somme the massed batteries of the British and French armies hammered away at the German lines. As darkness closed in the clangor redoubled. The flash of guns lit up the whole broad valley and the smooth, bare slopes of the downs. The earth quivered beneath the ceaseless pounding. Trench walls crumbled away, so that men found themselves standing in shallow, unsheltered gullies where they died in swathes, cut down by a sleet of machine gun bullets.

One corner of Y-Wood was on fire. Dead trees flamed like torches, casting a smoky red glare over the blasted landscape.

Crouching on the fire step in the front line trench, Hill peered at the luminous dial of his watch. Halfpast seven. Time to be moving. He took one last puff of his cigaret and flipped the butt over the sandbags.

Three men were huddled beside him on the fire step. Leaning over, he tapped one of them on the shoulder and yelled:

"All right, Stenton. Mr. Ormrod is standing by at No. 1 gun pit. Tell him to cease fire. The patrol is starting out in two minutes. Tell him I'll meet him as near nine o'clock as possible."

"Good luck, sir," the runner called out as he clumped down the trench. "We'll be looking for you."

"And don't you shoot me in the back," Hill went on, his lips close to an infantry officer's ear. "There's quite enough stuff buzzing about as is. Sentries all warned?"

"There won't be a shot fired until nine o'clock. I don't envy you going out there. The Boche has got the wind up. They've been doing some wild shooting."

"You'll get yours tomorrow in the morning," promised Hill.

"I say, old bean, have you kissed and made up with Ormrod on this momentous occasion?"

"To hell with him!"

The infantryman subsided. The subject did not seem to call for any further comment.

Hill stood up and smacked his pockets to make sure that he had everything he needed: revolver, compass, first aid kit.

"All set, Sergeant?" he inquired, turning to the last man, a squat, broad beamed gunner hunkered down on his haunches with a short clay pipe between his teeth. "Then let's go."

The sergeant tapped out his pipe and placed it carefully inside his steel helmet.

"They breaks if you so much as looks at 'em," he volunteered, hoisting himself up on to the parapet. "Gawd!" he added as the flashing, seething panorama opened up before his eyes. "Cripes! What a night for a murder!"

On all fours they crawled through a passage in their own wire, the sergeant holding on to Hill's ankle. There was not an inch of level ground. They climbed out of one shell hole only to slither down into another. Some holes were empty, in others there were weird dark, nameless things that stank and collapsed in squelching horror when stepped upon. Rockets burst overhead, drenching the earth with a brilliant white light. There wasn't a tuft of grass or a weed: nothing but old tin cans, cartridge clips and old boots. Machine guns clattered spasmodically, skimming the chalky lips of the craters with a hail of bullets.

It took Hill half an hour to reach his goal, thirty minutes to travel two hundred yards. He stumbled head on against an iron picket. Strands of loose wire, their severed ends coiled up in knots, were festooned about it.

By the light of a rocket he made out the row of sandbags along the top of the German parapet.

A storm of bullets sent him rolling into a hole; the sergeant dived in on top of him.

"Got your cutters?" he breathed. "We're there."

"I got 'em" muttered the noncom. "There ain't much wire left, judging by the looks of things. The Devons ought to waltz straight through to Peronne."

Flat to the ground they went on down the line. Here and there a few strands of barbed wire had withstood the blast of the trench mortar bombs. The sergeant snipped them away one by one. To make sure that no obstacles remained they had to creep up within ten feet of the enemy parapet.

It was not a pleasant sensation. In fact, it was a damnable sensation, and Hill heaved a tremendous sigh of relief when, at last, he drew abreast of the southern tip of Y-Wood, which marked the end of his sector. Beads of ice cold sweat dribbled down his cheeks and his throat was as dry as dust.

Crouching in the bottom of a crater, wallowing in two feet of mud, he whispered:

"And that's that. Home we go, Sergeant. I guess we'll strike the right spot if—"

The words died away on his lips.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw something move, something blacker than the surrounding darkness. He held his breath and waited. A rocket curved upward, leaving a trail of sparks in its wake, and as it burst Hill caught sight of a man rising waist high out of the earth—a bareheaded man with a revolver in his hand. He was leaning forward, peering, so it seemed, straight

down into Hill's face. Sharply silhouetted against the brilliant background, he loomed black and enormous, an uncouth creature with a small, bullet head and broad shoulders. As the light faded he moved.

Hill thought fast. There were no patrols out; the man must be a German. Probably a sentry in an advanced listening post.

He caught the sergeant by the wrist.

"See him?" he whispered. "Heinie! If he comes this way, nail him! No. Put that knife away. Get him alive. Maybe he knows something."

"Orl right, sir," grumbled the sergeant. "Cripes! He ain't half making a noise, fit to raise the dead."

The sound of heavy breathing was distinctly audible. It came closer, grew louder. Then the round, bullet head appeared above the rim of the shell hole. The rest was easy. Hill hit the man with the barrel of his revolver, the sergeant grabbed him by the ears and jerked him down into the mud. The prisoner didn't have a chance to make a fuss. The only thing he said before his mouth went under water sounded very much like "Glub!" He gave a few half hearted kicks, but he lay quite still when he felt the cold muzzle of Hill's revolver boring into his spine.

They didn't waste any words on him. When they decided to move, the sergeant caught him by the scruff of the neck and flung him out of the hole. There was mud in his eyes and mud in his mouth. He went along as meekly as a little lamb, running when they ran, flattening out when they dropped on top of him.

They were almost home when the sergeant made a startling discovery: the prisoner was wearing a Sam Browne belt and the badges of rank of a British officer.

"He's no German," the noncom told Hill. "Leastways, he's not wearing a German uniform."

"Then he'll be shot as a spy," asserted Hill, who was trying to read the bearing on his compass. "So far as I can make out we're on the right road. What did you say was the matter with this fellow's uniform?"

"You fool!" said the prisoner, who had succeeded in spitting out most of the mud in his mouth. "You stupid fool! This is an outrage! A deliberately planned outrage—"

"Cripes!" muttered the sergeant. "It's Lieutenant Ormrod! We captured Lieutenant Ormrod!"

The rest was silence until they reached their own front line, for that particular stretch of No Man's Land was ill suited for an argument. The Germans were peppering it with shrapnel and machine gun fire, and a battery of British 9.2 howitzers was endeavoring to blot Y-Wood off the map. Some of its shells landed in among the trees, others fell short, and the back blast of the explosions sprayed fifty pound hunks of steel over a wide area.

Hugging the ground, the three men squirmed their way along. At last they were challenged by a sentry who compelled them to come to a halt while he surveyed them and went through the prescribed routine.

" 'Alt! Who goes there?"

"Artillery patrol," snapped Ormrod, whose eagerness to slide over the parapet was checked by the glimmer of a bayonet. "Officers' patrol!"

"Advance, officers' patrol, and give the countersign."

"Countersign!" sputtered Ormrod. "You idiot! What countersign? I am the officer commanding the 114th Trench Mortar Battery!"

"I know, sir, but I got to 'ave the countersign," the sentry said uneasily. "It's orders."

"Polka dot," Hill called out.

The sentry lowered his rifle.

"All right, sir. Better 'op in."

They hopped in.

The storm did not break until they reached the dugout in the support line where the battery's reserve supply of bombs was stored.

SEEN by the light of the storm lantern hanging from the ceiling, Ormrod's convulsed countenance was not a thing of beauty and a joy forever. His eyes blazed out of a mask of mud, and in the middle of his forehead there was a long, bluish welt made by the barrel of Hill's revolver.

"I want," he began, "an explanation, a written explanation. If it is not satisfactory I shall place you, Mr. Hill, and you, Sergeant Bodgers, under arrest. The charge will be, 'While on active service, having struck a superior officer.' "

"We mistook you for a German," Bodgers blurted out. "You didn't have on no helmet, sir, and coming on you like that in the dark, out there, we didn't properly know who you were."

"My helmet was knocked off my head—torn off. It rolled into a hole. But that is irrelevant. You had no right to be out there at all. I sent a written message countermanding my previous order. I decided to carry out the patrol myself."

"Not to my knowledge, sir, no message arrived."

"Ask Mr. Hill whether or not he received my message?"

A look of long endured disgust appeared on the sergeant's face as he turned to Hill.

"Mr. Ormrod, sir, wants to know if you received a message."

"Dispatched at seven o'clock from No. 1 gun pit," added Ormrod.

"Mr. Ormrod says it was dispatched at seven o'clock from No. 1 gun pit," chorused the sergeant, whose mustache was beginning to bristle.

"My compliments to Mr. Ormrod," Hill said politely, "and will you please tell him no message was received before we went out on patrol at seven-thirty."

Bodgers relayed the information.

"I don't believe a word you're saying!" cried Ormrod. "You're lying both of you—lying! And I'll prove it! And I'll have you both court-martialed. By Jove, I shall! The pair of you!"

"Just one moment," Bodgers broke in. "I got my rights same as anybody else. You say I'm lying. You prove it, or I'll be making a complaint myself. I'm fed up with this here business, I am. I ain't one for criticizing my officers, but all this business of passing notes around, and telling me to ask an officer what's standing not two feet away 'has he received a message'—Caw! It makes me sick!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" applauded Hill, carried away by his enthusiasm.

"Mr. Hill!"

"Sir!" His face turned to stone.

Ormrod started to say something scathing about "gross and unforgivable breaches of discipline" when the curtain over the doorway was jerked aside and a head appeared on a level with the ceiling.

"Is an officer by the name of Hill in here?" the newcomer asked. He held out a muddy envelop. "Been hunting high and low for you, sir. I'm from the Durham's headquarters. We found your runner a couple of hours ago in Tottenham Court Road. A shell got him, severed his spine. Captain Sanderson thought the message might be urgent."

The curtain dropped back in place. Hill slit open the envelop. The note read:

To Lt. Hill.
Confidential.

Cancel last order. You will take charge of the battery while I am out on patrol. I place no faith in your dependability or your courage. A cad can not be trusted to perform such an important task. Cads skulk in shell holes.

I beg to remain, sir,
Your obdt. svt.,
—WILLIAM ORMROD, LT.
O. C. 114 T. M. B.

Hill kept his temper in check. The effort made him dizzy. His heart was pounding against his ribs.

"I'll make out a written report," he announced, addressing the wall of the

dugout. "The wire is cut from one end of our sector to the other. Sergeant Bodgers clipped all the strands which had not been severed by gun fire. He ought to be recommended for the D. C. M."

Ormrod turned to the sergeant, screwing up his face into a semblance of a smile.

"Good work," he said jovially. "Splendid work, Sergeant! I want to congratulate you. I—ah—take back what I said. I was rather hasty. Great pity about Cheney having gone west." Without pausing for breath, he added, "I must phone headquarters at once. They'll want to know about the wire. Good shooting, eh, what?"

He flung the last words over his shoulder as he hurried out of the dugout.

Sergeant Bodgers removed his tin hat and took his clay pipe out of the lining.

"What's all this about between you and Mr. Ormrod?" he inquired, turning one round, fishy eye upon Hill.

"God knows!" said Hill. He slid the note into his breast pocket. "But I do know one thing—if ever I catch that baboon in a dark corner, with no witnesses around, I'm going to do things to him. Do you know what he called me in that note? I'll tell you. A coward, not to be trusted out on patrol—"

Bodgers was thumbing cut plug into his pipe.

"Caw!" he said thoughtfully. "Did he now? I ain't one for criticizing officers, but I wonder just how far he got on his private patrol."

"Never mind about that," chuckled Hill. "Wait until I send in my report! He'll never be the same again."

HILL'S report was a work of art. Inspiration came to him while he sat on a stack of bombs in No. 2 gun pit, waiting for zero hour. Unfortunately he still had at least ten thousand words to write when, at break of day, the barrage dropped on the German lines and the infantry left the trenches.

He saw them swarm over the parapet, form up and go forward behind the curtain of fire. And above the rolling thunder of the barrage he heard the staccato rattle of machine guns, and he saw the attacking waves go down like ripe wheat, in line of battalions, Durhams and Manchesters, West Ridings and North Lances. And the German counter-barrage came down like a wall between the lines, and into the smoke went more men, humbly bowing their heads as they went to their death.

And the battle of the Somme was begun in a monstrous whirlwind of steel and fire.

Out of the smoke, after awhile, came a slow stream of wounded men, mute, dazed, a look of stunned horror in their eyes. The trench mortar gunners shouted at them as they went by. But they knew nothing, less than nothing. Few had reached the German trenches, none of them had set eyes on a German soldier dead or alive.

"You got through, didn't you?" persisted Hill, walking along the trench beside a corporal whose left arm had been smashed. "Don't tell me the show is a flop."

"Go and see for yourself," snarled the corporal. "Try to get through."

Somebody tapped Hill on the shoulder. Sergeant Bodgers' voice shouted in his ear:

"Mr. Ormrod's here. Him and a brass hat. They want to see you at once."

Hill found them waiting in the gun pit. The staff captain was a long, lean creature with a scrubby mustache and buck teeth. He was very dirty and very calm.

"As I was telling your battery commander," he said to Hill, "the 27th Brigade is held up opposite Monfrond farm. There—" he indicated a spot on his map about five hundred yards east of Y-Wood.

"We've broken through!" cried Hill. "Say, that's great!"

The staff officer looked inquiringly at

Ormrod.

"Mr. Hill is American," the latter said stiffly.

"Really? How perfectly jolly!" beamed the captain. "Yes, we're over the front line, but we can't get the blighters out of Monfrond farm, and we can't shell it because the Manchesters are holding one corner of the bally place. I want you to go forward and help them."

"Now?" inquired Ormrod.

"At once! Before the counter-attack starts. You can put your mortars in the old German support trench. How about ammunition? You'll need a hundred rounds at least. The confounded farm is full of concrete gun pits."

"We've got about a hundred rounds on hand," admitted Ormrod, "but we are short of—"

"I'll arrange for a carrying party to help you. Rush your guns forward at once and pick out suitable emplacements. You—" he nodded to Hill—"come with me. I'll detail a company of Manchesters to carry the bombs."

The outfit he entrusted to Hill was not a real company in any sense of the word. It was made up of scraps and loose ends, men who had lost their units, men who had hurt their ankles when the time came to go over the top, men whose puttees had come undone at the crucial moment. A sorry, dejected lot.

"On the double!" Hill barked at them. "Get going!"

They shambled along in slow time, dragging their feet. And they wilted beneath the weight of the bombs. One man, one bomb: sixty pounds of steel and high explosive.

"Careful!" Hill called out. "They're fused. Don't drop 'em."

"We're infantrymen," a trooper retorted. "This is a gunner's job."

"Pick up that bomb," ordered Hill, "or I'll flatten you out. Move!"

The man obeyed.

To keep track of his flock he had to climb out of the trench and run from one end of the line to the other, goading them along. Two sergeants assisted him, but their combined efforts could not compel the carrying party to move faster than a snail's pace.

When they came to the old front line the leaders balked.

"Come on," brayed Hill. "Get out of that trench!"

He had to threaten them with his revolver before they condescended to hear him. One by one they crept out into the open. Ahead lay the German barrage, boiling like a volcano. A stray bullet caught one man in the stomach, shrapnel dropped three more, then a bomb exploded tearing a great gap in the slow moving line.

The others stumbled onward into the heart of the inferno. The dead lay thick underfoot.

A clod of earth struck the back of Hill's knees. He went down heels over head. Two steps farther on he was bowled over again by the blast of an explosion. A trickle of blood ran from his nostrils into his wide open mouth. When he got up he saw his men galloping past him as fast as they could go. They were galloping in the right direction with the one surviving sergeant at their heels.

Forty-three of them came out of the barrage and slid into the old German front line. Five more dropped out before Hill located the battery position. He came upon it by accident after having wandered about through a maze of trenches which seemed to lead nowhere.

The first man he met was Ormrod, who yelled:

"Where the devil have you been? I've been waiting three-quarters of an hour for you. For God's sake, hurry!"

The guns were in position behind the ruins of a stone wall skirting the edge of Monfrond farm. Two guns only. The third lay out in No Man's Land.

Machine gun bullets whizzed over the wall. Crouching behind it and in nearby shell holes, a battalion of Durhams waited for the order to go forward.

Ormrod counted the bombs as the

carrying party stacked them by the guns.

"And that's all!" he cried. "Thirty-eight! You were told to bring a hundred. Damn it, sir, where are the others?"

"You jackass, there's a war on," Hill shouted in his face. "One more wisecrack out of you and I'll put a bullet into your nut."

"I lost one gun out of three, you've lost over fifty per cent. of your men!"

An infantry colonel broke in upon the duet. He wasn't in a good temper either.

"How soon are you going to open fire?" he demanded. "We'll have to fall back if you delay much longer."

"I was telling my subaltern—" began Ormrod.

"Tell him later. Come here!" Gingerly he peered over the wall. "See that house there, straight ahead, past the manure heap?"

Hill caught a glimpse of a one-story building. Sandbags blocked the windows and the doorway. The tiled roof was shot full of holes.

"That's one target," the colonel went on. "The other one is over on the left by the gate—that mound of bricks and sandbags. The machine guns in there can sweep the whole valley as far as Capy. Blow 'em up. We'll attack as soon as you've fired your last shot."

The farmyard, as far as the manure heap, was littered with corpses, and rolls of barbed wire, and smashed agricultural implements.

"Take No. 2 gun," ordered Ormrod. "Your target—the house. And do not forget that you have only nineteen rounds of ammunition, Mr. Hill. Don't waste them if you can help it."

Hill turned his back on his commanding officer.

"Stand by, No. 2 gun!" he called out. "Swing her round, Sergeant Bodgers. More. Aim at my hand." He glanced over the wall to check his line of fire and was greeted by a hail of bullets. "More. Steady! Range 175. Percussion fuse. Load!"

A gunner slipped the steel shaft of the bomb into the muzzle of the trench mortar. Bodgers stepped back, drawing the firing lanyard taut.

"Ready!"

"Fire!"

The bomb shot up into the air, straight up. At the top of its flight it turned leisurely over, and streaked earthward with its shaft sticking out behind like the tail of a comet. *Crump!* In front of the house the earth vomited a pillar of pinkish yellow smoke.

"Add ten. Repeat."

"I'd say twenty-five," Ormrod remarked.

Hill glared at him out of bloodshot eyes.

"You would! That's all you know about it. Add ten, Sergeant. Report when ready."

"Range 185," chanted Bodgers. "Ready."

"Fire!"

The second bomb landed squarely on the target. When the smoke cleared Hill saw that the left wing of the house, as far as the window, had vanished, roof and all, as though it had been sliced off by a knife.

He didn't have time to gloat over the accuracy of his marksmanship. Before the dust settled every machine gun in Monfrond farm roared into action, spattering lead along the crest of the wall, chipping off jagged fragments of stone.

The two mortars banged away, four shots a minute. They were primitive weapons, crudely made and clumsy, but at that range they were far more efficient than ordinary shell fire. The bombs tore great craters, ten feet deep, in the Monfrond stronghold. Beneath their impact dugouts caved in and trenches collapsed.

Ormrod's sixth shot touched off a stock of hand grenades in some underground recess. The explosion hoisted his target out of the earth. It burst like a land mine, heaving men and guns, iron girders and slabs of concrete in

every direction.

The German garrison was signaling frantically for artillery support. It came with a rush—shrapnel and more shrapnel. The gun emplacements became a shambles. Hit in the foot, Sergeant Bodgers dragged himself under the lee side of the wall. A sliver of stone cut Ormrod's ear. He bled like a stuck pig. His pointer, hit by a nose cap, fell over on top of the trench mortar.

Four of Hill's men were flattened out. He aimed and fired the last few rounds himself. Something hit his right arm. It hung numb and useless at his side. Blood trickled down his finger tips. Angrily, cursing through his gritted teeth, he gripped the lanyard in his left hand and gave it a jerk which snapped it in two.

The 114th Trench Mortar Battery was down to nine men, but the Monfrond stronghold was little more than a hole in the ground. When the infantry scaled the wall and ran across the open there were no machine guns left to oppose them.

Torn, battered and disheveled, Hill turned toward Ormrod, who was equally torn and battered and disheveled. They had reached the breaking point. Neither of them was quite sane. They had forgotten where they were and why they were there. The shrapnel might have been a gentle shower for all they cared.

"You lousy baboon," croaked Hill, "I've got a few things to say to you. Cads skulk in shell holes, do they?"

"You rotter!" Ormrod spat at him. The long forgotten cause for their blind hatred glimmered for a moment at the back of his blurred mind. "No decent girl—" he began, but words failed him.

He flapped his hand across Hill's mouth. Summoning all his strength, Hill raised his left fist and pushed it into his battery commander's eye. They fell against each other, face to face, swayed unsteadily for a moment or so, and collapsed by the trail of No. 2 gun. They lay where they fell, locked in each other's arms, too exhausted to move.

Sergeant Bodgers paused in the act of slipping a safety pin through the bandage wrapped around his wounded foot.

"Twenty years I been in the army," he observed, "and never have I seen the likes of these two. I ain't one for criticising my officers—as temporary officers go they might be worse—but you mark my words, they'll be murder yet before they're through. Women, always women! That's all they think about, these one-star wonders. Drag 'em apart, boys, so's they don't bite their noses off when they comes to. And Gawd help us all if the Jerries put a barrage on the farm!"

HILL was standing on the sidewalk, sadly contemplating the boarding in front of the Restaurant de l'Ecrevisse when, out of the tail of his eye, he perceived Lieutenant Ormrod loitering on the opposite pavement.

He had not seen Ormrod since he had been carted away from Monfrond farm on a stretcher. At the casualty clearing station they had been placed in separate wards. Indeed, Hill had been led to believe, by an orderly who seemed to know what he was talking about, that Ormrod had been sent home suffering from numerous gunshot wounds and shellshock.

The news had helped Hill to forget his own injuries. A shrapnel bullet had gone through the biceps of his right arm. The wound was healing nicely—so nicely that he had obtained a twenty-four hour pass to attend to some "urgent, private affairs" in Amiens.

Like a homing pigeon, he had made a bee-line for the Ecrevisse, only to find it boarded up.

And on the far side of the street lurked Ormrod with a bandage wrapped around his head to show the world what a marvelous fellow he was.

"If he butts in," Hill said to himself, "I'll kill him."

He went striding down the street to Charley's Bar, the wartime home of cherry flips. After the third cocktail he

felt much better.

"Ever heard of a girl called Ninette?" he inquired.

"I've heard of fifty Ninettes," Charley said placidly. "It's not what you might call an uncommon name."

So Hill drank a fourth cherry flip.

In lyric terms he described his particular Ninette—eyes of blue, fair hair, a dimple in one cheek—no, a dimple in either cheek, and ears, and a nose and a chin . . .

Charley shook his head.

"They come," he sighed, "and they go. You can't keep track of 'em all. You might try the Brasserie de l'Excelcior. Lots of people go there these days."

"You'd know her," swore Hill. "She's not like other girls. I'm going to marry this girl, if she'll have me. Finest girl in the world."

"That'll be twenty francs," said Charley. "You'd better go back to hospital and have your head examined."

"I'll find her if it's the last thing I do on earth," swore Hill. "Give me one more before I try the Excelcior."

As he left the bar he spied Ormrod coming out of the Café des Allies, wiping his lips on a silk handkerchief.

They headed in the same direction. Hill increased his pace; so did Ormrod. Side by side they entered the Brasserie.

It was a popular resort, full of noise, people and tobacco smoke. White aproned waiters scurried about bearing trays laden with bottles and glasses. Everybody was talking at once. Every other customer was reading a paper and commenting upon the news.

Ormrod turned to the right with so much decision that automatically Hill followed close behind. He wasn't going to let anybody steal a march on him. They went around the room in quick time. All at once a gloved hand waved above the top of a newspaper. They saw a small black hat and a pair of blue eyes.

Ninette!

They bore down upon her. At the same table sat a civilian, a stout, middle aged Frenchman with a beard, eyeglasses and liver spots. He was smoking a cherrywood pipe.

"*Mes enfants!*" cried Ninette. "I am delighted to see you. You have been wounded. Ah, this terrible, terrible war, is it not? But you are alive—you are safe. That is wonderful! You must meet my husband."

The man stood up. He had an ample stomach. The front of his waistcoat was white with ashes. He peered at the bemused lieutenants over the rims of his glasses.

"Jules," said Ninette, "these are the officers I told you about. They have been kindness itself. Such tact! Such delicacy! It has been a pleasure to know them."

They shook his hand. It was soft and moist as a rubber sponge.

"My husband," she explained, "is an inspector of the railroads. Boulogne today, Le Havre tomorrow. It is always thus with us! Always on the move. We leave for Toulouse next Friday. How nice it is to meet you again. I told Jules of that terrible air raid—"

The man looked politely interested.

"Will you not join us?" he inquired, and he might just as well have said, "What the devil do you mean by interfering with a happy family party, you insufferable young squirts?"

Ormrod was the first to recover from the shock.

"No," he said quickly. "I regret. We are hunting for a man—a friend. We were merely passing through, looking for him."

"That's right," agreed Hill. "It is very urgent."

"Too bad," murmured the husband. "Another time perhaps?"

Again they shook his hand, and they shook Ninette's hand. She smiled sweetly, but somehow she was no longer wonderful and alluring.

"Goodby, madame," Hill said stiffly. "Adieu!"

They felt the railroad inspector's eyes

boring into their backs as they hurried toward the nearest exit. They did not stop going until they were well out of sight of the Brasserie. By that time they were within a stone's throw of Charley's Bar.

Their eyes met. For a long moment they stood and stared at each other.

"Married!" Ormrod said at last. "To that behemoth!"

Hill nodded his head up and down in slow time.

"Of all the damn fools," he commented. "Of all the boneheads—"

"Quite!" agreed Ormrod. "I heard this morning that the battery is to be mentioned in army orders. I—er—thought you might like to know."

The ice was thawing fast.

"That's great news!" cried Hill. "Army orders, huh? By golly! What do you know about that? Say, you deserve all the credit, the way you rushed those guns through the barrage and up to the farm—"

"My dear chap, that was nothing," declared Ormrod. "You brought the bombs through, by Jove! That was the worst part of the whole job."

"What are we standing here for?" Hill demanded. "How about a shot in the arm? How about two? How about a good dinner afterward somewhere?"

Arm in arm they sailed into Charley's Bar.

"Find your girl?" inquired Charley.

"Oh, we found her all right," Hill admitted disgustedly. "But women! Don't talk to me about women. They can make more trouble than the whole German army."

Later, much later, from a horse drawn cab, two officers alighted in front of the gate of the casualty clearing station. Their gait was somewhat unsteady. They helped each other to totter across the sidewalk.

"Blotto," decided the sentry, sniffing the air. " 'Struth, if I couldn't 'old my liquor no better'n that I'd be shoved in the bloomin' guard'ouse, but I'm only a blasted private."

He challenged them in an angry voice.

" 'S all right," one of the officers assured him. " 'S perfectly all right, sentry. You see thish lieutenant; he's never skulked in a shell hole in his life. If anybody shays sho it's a lie, a contemptible lie."

"Pass, friend, all's well," the sentry said wearily. "And you better watch your step, sir," he added out of the corner of his mouth. "Them long nosed night nurses can be mighty particular."

The word "night nurses" had the effect of a cold shower upon them.

"Esteemed Battery Commander," said the second officer, whose arm hung in a sling, "we want no truck with women in or out of uniform. Remember the Ecrevisse! Remember Monfrond farm! Let us be sober."

They marched toward the hospital tents holding themselves as straight as ramrods.

"Another pair of lunatics," grunted the sentry. "What's wrong with women, I'd like to know?"

By ROBERT SIMPSON

A MAN *of* SENTIMENT

A Story of the Slave Coast

"WHAT'S that? Bring my ship alongside your wharf! What the devil do you take me for? What do you think the *Farquah* is? A gigboat?"

Captain Murray's rotund figure stumped out of Balloch's office living-room on to the veranda and his fat and heavy right hand indicated the main wharf of the African Merchants Company's Dannatown trading beach with a gesture that was expressive of a choleric and profound contempt.

"Look at it! If I ever leaned the *Farquah* against that ramshackle contraption, the damned thing would cave in like a cardboard box!"

Balloch's long, rangy legs had carried him to the veranda in Murray's wake. He was the youngest agent in the service of the African Merchants Company; just a bit too young some of the older traders on the Lower Niger thought, even though these same critics of Balloch's comparatively tender years were willing to concede that his sponsor, Kingdon, agent-general of the company, rarely made a mistake in the business of picking the right man for any kind of job.

Certainly there was no excuse for his making a mistake where Balloch was concerned. For, in the palm oil trade at least, Kingdon had brought Balloch up from infancy, and had had every opportunity to gage his possibilities under almost any circumstances.

Just then, however, it did look as if Kingdon had been a trifle premature in elevating Balloch from a trading beach clerkship to the responsible position of agent in charge. Because Balloch, with a long amber filled glass in hand and a mounting alcoholic flush upon his face, did not look as if he could be held responsible for anything except ordering the next drink.

"What's the matter with the wharf?" he asked truculently. "Or don't you want my stuff? Of course, if you don't want my oil and kernels and such, that's all right with me and no harm done."

"Bah! You're drunk! Or you're pretending to be. Damned if I don't think you're trying to get me to bring the *Farquah* alongside so that she'll knock your wharf flat and you can build a new one with Lloyds' insurance money."

Balloch grinned sourly, glanced briefly toward the big black hulled freighter anchored in the sizzling glare of midstream, then let his eyes rove, with irritating inconsequence, over the beach below.

The gesticulating chatter of early afternoon came up to him from the mangrove stick breakwater that was lined with oil and kernel canoes, and above the hubbub of native voices, the shrill squeal of the crane on the oil wharf told him that business was rather better than usual. He had an increase of thirty per cent. to his credit since he had taken over the Dannatown Creek factory, and in another month or two he thought he could raise it to fifty. He had a bet with Preston of Marsden and Company . . . Balloch's eyes came up from the beach and looked along the veranda.

The *punkah* in the far corner had stopped and his friend Preston of Marsden's, lolling in a canvas deck chair under it, had evidently gone to sleep.

"*Punkah! Animo!* Your hand done die?"

The diminutive Kroo *punkah* boy, wholly concealed in the shadows behind a wallowing Madeira chair, came suddenly to life and Balloch took another drink out of the tall amber filled glass.

Captain Murray, fuming with impatience, and at the same time trying to read sinister intent into Balloch's altogether noncommittal expression, waited a few more explosive seconds, then barked:

"You heard what I said, didn't you? You're not deaf."

"I heard you. Lloyds' insurance. It's a great idea. I'll try it on Duncan of the *Gana-Gana* when he gets here. Thanks for the tip."

"Wh—why you drunken young puppy! You jackanapes! Damned if I don't report you to Kingdon for this!" Murray had reached the head of the stairway that led down to the beach and the gig wharf where his gig awaited him. "Get your surf boats loaded and started my way inside of half an hour or —or I'll finish you. Understand me? I'll report you to Kingdon and your Liverpool office and you'll go back to beach clerking where you belong."

Balloch held up his glass.

"Chin-chin, you pot bellied old crab! Bring that gin tank of yours alongside my wharf like a regular skipper and— what's the matter? Not going so soon?"

Murray paused on the second step as if he were strangling. His mouth opened and closed again, reminding Balloch of an inarticulate goldfish; then he pounded his way down to the beach without even remembering that the ostensibly sleeping Preston was a friend and a customer of his.

Balloch leaned over the rail watching the irate skipper depart; watched him till his gigboat had almost reached the *Farquah's* lowered companion ladder. Then Balloch emptied his glass, dabbed at the perspiration on his face and forehead, glanced in Preston's direction a moment, and strolled into his office.

On the blotter on his desk was some recently arrived mail and on top of the little heap was a decidedly juvenile scrawl in pencil. Balloch picked this up, grinned a slightly twisted grin, and

put the note away in the right hand top drawer of the desk. But as he strolled out to the veranda again and looked toward the *Farquah* and saw Murray's round, white uniformed figure going up the companion ladder, the grin faded.

A furrow settled between his eyes; a furrow of doubt and of sullen resentment that deepened as he moved along the veranda and flung himself into the wallowing Madeira chair, stretching his long legs out on the leg rest.

For several moments, save for the sighing voice of the *punkah,* and the drone of life that welled up from the beach below, there was a heavy silence. Balloch's cloudy and somewhat red rimmed eyes studied Preston for a little while, then moved restlessly out to the *Farquah's* companion ladder, only to come back to Preston again.

"Come on! Come out of it! What do you think of that pot bellied crab telling me how and when to ship my cargoes?"

Preston opened one eye and closed it again. He had known Balloch ever since they had sweltered together on Benin River in the first year of their apprenticeship as beach clerks in the palm oil trade; and though they were now supposed to be bitter rivals engaged in a ruthless battle for trading supremacy on Dannatown Creek, they still cursed the heat, the mangroves, and malarial chills and fever in unison, and still managed, on frequent occasions, to drink out of the same bottle.

"Did you hear him say he'd report me? Put me back on the beach? Damn his hide! I'll roll him like a barrel. What does he think I am? Talking to me as if I was one of his nigger deckhands!"

PRESTON paid no attention to him. He was accustomed to Balloch's alcoholic humors and to the threats and epithets that were wont to accompany them. So Balloch's glance went sourly back to the *Farquah*—to her lowered companion ladder particularly—and at once he swung his long legs down from the leg rest and sat up straight.

For now there were two ship's officers in white drill uniform visible at the top of the companion ladder. And presently one of them came smartly down the ladder, stepped into the waiting gigboat and the black crew at the oars shoved off. In a few minutes, while Balloch watched in cold eyed silence, it became apparent that the gigboat was headed in the direction of his own wharf.

"Hunh. Coming back for more, is he? I'll break his ruddy neck!"

"Shut up," Preston said without excitement, and dragged himself up into a sitting position so that he, too, could see what was going on beyond the veranda rail. "You're drunk and you're babbling like an infant baboon. Why do you fool with liquor if it can chuck you around like an old boot?"

"Huh? Who's an old boot? You don't think I'm going to let Murray or any other ruddy gin tank skipper tell me how and when I'll ship."

"The *Farquah* isn't a gin tank and that isn't Murray who's heading this way. If you weren't so bleary eyed you'd know who it was."

"Who is it? And what of it? I'll clean up his damned ship."

"That's Marquis," Preston said briefly. "The chief officer. Know him?"

"What about him?"

"Well," Preston suggested dryly, "he'll probably hope you're not bluffing."

"Bluffing!" Balloch's tall, rangy figure shot upward. "Who's bluffing? I'll show you and him whether I'm bluffing or not."

"Shut up and sit down," Preston replied and got between Balloch and the stairs leading down to the beach. "Even if you were sober, Marquis could spot you twenty-five pounds and knock your silly head off in a couple of rounds. Better let me go down and handle this. Marquis is a friend of mine."

"Handle nothing! I'm running this beach. And who's Marquis anyway? Used to be on the *Boma,* didn't he?"

Preston seemed to be genuinely startled.

"Ah! The dawn of intelligence. Then you do know who Marquis is?"

"Him! Hell! What of it? I'm Balloch. And I've split a one-inch board with one wallop."

"Hunh," Preston grunted disparagingly. "And every time you get drunk you brag about it."

"I'm not bragging. You saw me do it. Didn't you see me do it?"

"Yes, I saw you," Preston agreed, "and I noticed that the board had no defense. But Marquis isn't like that. He has a defense—the kind of defense that'll make you think you're in a hail storm." Preston gripped both of Balloch's arms. "Come on, Balloch. Don't be a fool. If you get into a scrap with Marquis or any of Captain Murray's officers, and Kingdon ever heard of it—well, need I say more?"

"Kingdon." Balloch repeated the name dully, as if the significance of it took all the life out of his belligerence; or he was afraid if he thought about it too much, it might. "What about Kingdon? He's no jellyfish. He wouldn't expect me to stand for Murray telling me how and when I'll ship my cargoes. If Murray wants my oil and kernels and rubber, let him come alongside and get 'em. If he doesn't want them, I can wait for the *Gana-Gana.*"

Preston grinned wisely.

"Don't be any younger than you can help. Murray's no fool. He's evidently heard, just as I did, that Kingdon condemned that wharf a couple of months ago, and he's taking no chances. And Murray probably knows, too, that for some reason or other, you're holding back this shipment to give it to Duncan of the *Gana-Gana.* And that makes him boil right over." Preston's grin broadened. "Come on. Sober up. Or the first thing you'll know, you'll have Kingdon around here in the *Sandpiper* wanting to know why you haven't started building a new wharf."

Balloch threw off Preston's restraining hands with a gesture of impatience. The repeated reference to Kingdon seemed to irritate rather than placate him and there was no doubt about the fact that, while he was not at all afraid of Marquis of the *Farquah* who was a fighter of enviable renown, he was decidedly afraid of Kingdon who, in a pugnacious sense, was not a fighter at all.

This fear of Balloch's was not due to the fact that Kingdon was the agent-general of the African Merchants Company. For Balloch had no respect for mere authority. Neither was his fear due to Kingdon's physical attributes, for Kingdon was a little man—quiet, inoffensive, an apparently natural born pacifist whose business in life seemed to be that of intervening between antagonistic forces and preventing anything from a black eye to wholesale slaughter.

Balloch had seen Kingdon do this on the Akerri Road, near Warri, when the forces engaged in mortal combat had been a mob of blood crazed native road builders bottled up in a *juju* hut, and a company of Yoruba soldier men who were doing the bottling with bullets.

And Kingdon, because the whole business was the result of bad temper and a pitifully foolish mistake, had stepped in between the forces of government and those of rebellion—literally walked between the guns of both of them until he reached the *juju* hut and advised the leader of the rebels to cease firing.

When Kingdon had collapsed with several bullets in his anatomy, it had been Balloch who had carried the little man out of the mess after the shooting was all over.

And it was because Balloch had seen Kingdon do this thing; because, on other occasions that had called for something more than mere physical courage, he had known Kingdon to see things through to an apparently impossible conclusion; because he just vaguely understood that Kingdon's gifts were gifts of the spirit

rather than of the head or the hand, that Balloch feared the quiet, unobtrusive little man as he consciously feared nothing else under the sun.

Balloch could understand a punch on the nose. There was something that could be done about that and Balloch prided himself that he could do it better than most. He could also understand the voice of authority speaking from a high place, telling him to do this or that. There was something that could be done about that too. He could tell the voice of authority to go to hell and take the consequences, if any, or he could be plumb sober, do as he was told and keep out of trouble.

But there was nothing to be done about Kingdon except respect and fear him.

You couldn't frighten *him*. You couldn't hit him. You couldn't tell him to go to hell. No matter how big you were, when Kingdon talked to you, you just felt like a ruddy paddleboy and probably looked just as dumb and vacant. And he never told you to do anything. He asked you if you would, and the fact that Kingdon had become agent-general of the African Merchants Company hadn't changed him in the least. He was still the same quiet, unassuming little man who had walked between the guns on the Akerri Road.

Incident to that occasion, Balloch had been in receipt of a lesson in restraint that should have lasted him a lifetime. But Balloch was Balloch, and while he was perfectly willing to admire and respect Kingdon and be loyal to him to the last notch, he resented having to be afraid of him.

"Kingdon's all right," he mumbled thickly, with his attention more upon the approaching gigboat than upon Preston. "Kingdon's a great little man —greatest little man on earth—and I'm not forgetting that he sent me up here and gave me my chance to come through as an agent. I'm not forgetting anything, not a damned thing. But when a potbellied crab like Murray steps on to my beach and talks to me as if I were a cook's helper in his own galley, and then sends a scrapper like Marquis ashore to do his fighting for him, eh? What do you expect me to do? Knuckle under just because Kingdon wouldn't like it?"

"Calm down. You're talking through the top of your head and—"

"You're crazy! If Marquis has come ashore looking for fight, he'll get it. I'll send him back to Murray on a stretcher."

Preston shrugged his shoulders and turned toward a small wicker table to pour himself another drink.

"And Kingdon'll send you back to beach clerking at Warri or Sapeli," he said quietly, "where even beach clerks wear white flannels nowadays. And when you're sweating down there filling requisitions and getting fined a month's pay for booting Sierra Leonese government clerks around, you'll think of me up here loafing under a *punkah* and making real money doing it."

Balloch made no reply. He gripped one of the veranda uprights with a large and powerful hand and watched the *Farquah's* gigboat slip alongside his gig wharf with a seaman-like flourish that was worthy of Chief Officer Marquis and all that he stood for. But the moment Marquis leaped ashore, Balloch's eyes shifted downriver.

THERE was nothing much for Balloch to see downriver or up. Two trading factories cheek by jowl on a sun baked strip of clearing that was always called a beach, a scattering of trade canoes idling along in the shadow of the mangroves—and mangroves and more mangroves. Mangroves as far as the eye could reach; a veritable sea of mangroves rolling to the outermost edge of Balloch's horizon.

"And your little heart will break," Preston added after a few moments' pause. "And you'll die. Chin-chin." Preston held up his glass. "Here's to

all good beach clerks. May their shoes never wear out."

Preston did not drink this toast. He made a show of doing so but Balloch paid no attention to him, for Balloch's eyes remained steadily fixed upon the horizon and even the sound of Marquis's step on the concrete path immediately below did not induce him to look down.

Preston put his glass on the little wicker table and took a single stride in the direction of the stairhead. Balloch wheeled, gripped Preston's arms and swung him back toward the canvas deck chair.

"Keep out of this! This is my beach and my business. I'll take care of it."

And without bothering to see whether Preston sat down or not, he turned toward the river again and fixed his attention upon an oil canoe that was drifting lazily downstream.

Marquis's step sounded on the stairs, came firmly along the veranda just a little way and again Balloch unexpectedly spun about and caught Preston signaling to the *Farquah's* chief officer to go slow.

What Marquis thought no man might know. He had the kind of face inadequately referred to as poker and, in addition to possessing a cold gray eye, he was one hundred and sixty pounds of fighting machinery that was credited with speed, punch and the capacity for taking as well as administering punishment.

"Hello, Preston," he said tonelessly, ignoring Balloch altogether. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Preston did not say. Neither did Balloch. He looked Marquis over, up and down and as far around as possible without moving anything more than his head.

"Whose errand boy are you?"

Marquis smiled, a thin slight smile that should have shriveled Balloch like a piece of overdone bacon.

"The skipper seems to think you're not going to ship on the *Farquah,*" Marquis said. "He seems also to think you called him a potbellied crab. And I just came ashore to find out when you are going to start the stuff moving."

"You did, eh? Aren't you the—"

"Because we're full up," Marquis added without any inflection in his voice, "and I thought you should know it before you start your surf boats our way."

Balloch winced. The corners of his mouth drew down and one hand, resting on the veranda rail, gripped the edge in a sudden tension that passed like a galvanic shock through his whole body.

"Marquis!" Preston shouted hoarsely. "Balloch! You're a couple of fools!"

"Get off my beach!" Balloch snapped at Marquis.

Again Marquis smiled that same thin withering smile; and Preston, with a quick glance at Balloch and at no little risk to himself, jumped between them.

"Snap out of it, both of you! It's too damned hot and—and—oh, have a drink."

Balloch's right arm, stiff as a piston rod, leaned against Preston's chest and Preston staggered backward as if he were of no more consequence than the *punkah* boy who squatted out of sight in the shadowed regions behind Balloch's Madeira chair.

"Edge!" Balloch ordered as if Marquis were a Kroo-boy.

Marquis's smile drifted. His gray eyes took on a cold blue glint that looked straight through Balloch and was intended to reduce him to a shaking pulp.

"You won't always be on your own veranda," Marquis said conversationally. "Or on your own beach."

"No," Balloch agreed. "In about fifteen minutes I'll be aboard the *Farquah.* Will that suit you or that potbellied crab of a skipper of yours any better?"

Marquis's poker face, for a fleeting instant of time, was not quite so much poker. This was different. Altogether different. When a man spoke like that there was just one thing to do.

"Why go to all that trouble?" he asked, and began to unfasten the buttons of his white uniform coat, while he carelessly chucked his sun helmet on the floor. "This veranda's wide enough and long enough for all I have to do."

"Marquis!" Preston protested gaspingly. "Have you gone off your nut? Don't you see he's had too much liquor?"

"Shut up!" Balloch yelled. "He came here looking for a fight and he's going to get it."

Marquis's coat was off and had joined his sun helmet; and Marquis's shoulders and arms certainly looked the punishing sort. But if Balloch noticed this as he stopped leaning against the veranda rail, he gave no hint of the fact.

"Balloch!" Preston pleaded, thinking more of Balloch's future than of the licking he would probably get. "Kingdon will—"

"Damn Kingdon! This is my beach, my business, my fight! Come on, little errand boy. What have you got?"

"You—damn—fools!"

Preston's voice whispered into a gaping, gasping silence as Marquis, using the jab as a sort of light introduction, drew Balloch away from the veranda rail and by a tricky exhibition of footwork moved him around until Balloch was backing slowly toward the stairs and toward the white assistants' end of the veranda beyond the stairhead.

Balloch was not aware of the significance of Marquis's strategy at first, and he was making little or no effort to hit out. His one idea seemed to be to find out just what Marquis had in his bag of tricks, and if any of these tricks mattered very much.

Then a sudden sharp smash full on the mouth, followed by a nasty scraping hook over his left eye told him that Marquis could hit, and that those lightning fast fists of his were capable of producing something more than frothily stinging jabs. A drooling trickle of blood showed at the corner of Balloch's mouth and another began its troublesome course into his left eye.

It was then, too, that Balloch just vaguely became aware of a chattering excitement on the beach immediately below, of dusky faces looking gapingly upward, and finally of Marquis's voice, low pitched, but clear and very distinct.

"You know where you are heading, don't you?" Marquis asked smoothly, and punctuated his remarks with a succession of irritating jabs. "You're going back to the beach clerk's end of the veranda. Back where you belong. The skipper said you were only a sublimated beach clerk anyway. *Savez?*"

Another smashing left on the mouth and an ugly, crunching right that made Balloch wonder if his cheek bone had caved in, brought a shout of protest from Preston and a shrill cry of primitive alarm from the beach below. Kroo houseboys filled the wide open doorway of the dining saloon, and the *punkah* boy was tiptoeing behind Preston, his mouth agape, the whites of his eyes gleaming like twin lights.

Balloch staggered backward a few steps, tried to cover up, took a shivering hook on the chin and, more by good luck than good judgment, shifted away from a straight left that whistled past the point of his jaw and hung itself around his neck.

Instantly Marquis's right pounded into Balloch's body, and his left coming once more into action, both fists, at close quarters, drove like alternating piston rods into Balloch's midsection. Then a sudden, snapping uppercut sent him teetering upon his heels to the very edge of the imaginary boundary line between the agent's end of the veranda and that of his assistants.

Marquis leaped in to finish the job, perspiration pouring from his forehead and face as if he had dipped his head into a bucket.

Balloch crouched and steadied, his long left arm sticking straight out, his right weaving, as if with the shakily uncertain balance of his body. His face was splashed and streaked with blood

and sweat, his mouth was swollen and puffy and only one eye was of any real use to him; and as Marquis and his punishing fists came in, Balloch crouched a little lower and it looked as if his knees would cave in at any moment.

Perhaps Marquis became just a little too sure, just a little careless. Perhaps it was the perspiration or a sharp glint of sunlight in his eyes. In any event, Balloch suddenly straightened. His long left appeared just to push against Marquis's chest to ward him off.

Marquis stopped. He lurched back a step and Balloch's restless right snapped like a whip thong to Marquis's jaw. Marquis reeled and spun. He saved himself from going down only because one groping arm chanced to curl itself around one of the veranda posts. His eyes, glassy and vacant, were turned away from Balloch whose puffy lips were moving painfully in speech.

"Come on, little errand boy. I've only hit you once."

Marquis tried to straighten and turn in Balloch's direction, and to help himself to do this, he took an involuntary convulsive grip upon the veranda post.

"Come on, you white livered scum!" Balloch rasped. "Put me back where I belong! Put me back!"

Marquis lurched away from the support of the veranda post. His glassy eyes turned toward Balloch, but his arms hung limply at his sides. Balloch looked toward Preston, whose white and worried face came sharply out of the background.

"Well," Balloch demanded, "what are you going to do?"

Before Preston could answer this or say anything at all, Marquis pitched forward on his face and sprawled at Balloch's feet.

Balloch looked down at him a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and, ignoring Preston, grunted tersely to the Kroo chief steward who was among the spectators crowding the dining saloon doorway:

"Take him 'way. Put him back for ship. One time!"

And without so much as another glance in Preston's or Marquis's direction, Balloch passed on into his office-living room, where he lingered for a very brief space, then continued to his bedroom with a book in his hand.

The book was a dictionary.

With the aid of one good eye, his face still smeared with blood, Balloch tried to find the meaning of the word "sublimated."

A WEEK later, Balloch was still trying to find out what sublimated meant. He did not know how to spell the word and he would not ask Preston or any of his own assistants to spell it for him.

The *Farquah* had gone. Balloch's battered countenance had returned to normal, and as far as Dannatown Creek was concerned, the loud tongued amaze at Marquis's sudden and sharp defeat had died down to a whisper. Balloch, oddly enough, never referred to it at all.

As day had followed day, and the effect of his lively association with old John Barleycorn died out of him, Balloch's eyes began to hold a waiting look. It was a look that, most of the time, fastened itself upon the downriver curve of Dannatown Creek. Evidently Balloch expected something of importance to come around that curve at any moment; and behind this expectancy of his there was a most unusual fear that was grappling with his faith in his own destiny.

This destiny of Balloch's, just then, was Kingdon, and he was sure the little man would understand because he always had. Kingdon had a trick of knowing the truth about things—of seeing through stone walls as if they were plate glass windows—of hearing a whisper above the clatter of many tongues and of getting uncannily down to the brass tacks of finding the sum of two and two.

So Balloch tried to think that he could trust Kingdon in this instance

just as much as he hoped Kingdon would trust him. Certainly the little man knew him well enough. And though Balloch was aware that he had slipped from grace once in a while, surely Kingdon knew that, in a pinch, when the old wallop was needed most, no matter what kind of wallop it was, it was always there right on time.

Balloch hoped Kingdon knew all this and that there was no need for him to make any excuses or explanations. He did not like to make excuses and in this case Balloch knew he had none to offer; none that he would offer to Kingdon or to anybody else for holding up the shipping of his oil and kernels and rubber till Duncan of the *Gana-Gana* came around to get them.

And every now and then, when black doubt descended upon him and his faith in Kingdon became overshadowed by his fear of the little man, Balloch went to the top right hand drawer of his desk and tried to bolster his courage with the rereading of a penciled scrawl in a very juvenile hand. Then he would muster a grin and mutter:

"Fine! Great! But what in thunder's keeping the *Gana-Gana?* Should have been here three weeks ago. If she's gone to Benin River or Sapeli first, this trip, I'm ditched!"

Then he would go out to the veranda and stand at the rail looking steadily downriver; and on the eighth day he saw, not the prow of the *Gana-Gana* coming around the curve, but the fan-like spray that leaped from the bows of a speeding government launch.

The launch paused just long enough at Balloch's gig wharf to deliver an official looking communication, then passed on upriver. A houseboy brought the letter up to Balloch who opened it and read:

> Dear Balloch:
>
> Sorry I won't be able to get up to Dannatown this tour as I find it necessary to leave for Calabar on the *Farquah* on the 19th. Please report to me at Benin River not later than the 18th.
>
> —KINGDON.

Balloch used the dictionary for a paperweight when he laid the memorandum on his desk and called for his houseboy.

"Bath water," he ordered. "One time. And tell headman come look me."

"Yessah."

The houseboy departed and presently the Kroo headman came scuffing along the veranda to stand in Balloch's doorway.

"I come look you, sah."

"I want eight paddle canoe. I go Benin River one time. Make quick!"

"Yessah. Benin River, sah. I catch canoe for dat, sah. One time."

"And tell Mr. Anderson come topside."

"Yessah."

Anderson was Balloch's senior assistant, and while Balloch bathed in a round wooden tub that compelled him to fold himself up like a jack-knife, Anderson stood carefully beyond the reach of the farthest splash and made hurried notes of Balloch's parting instructions.

"And ship everything on the *Gana-Gana,*" Balloch said in conclusion, reaching for a huge bath towel. "Also thank Captain Duncan for me for getting that monkey of mine home to my kid brother. Tell him I had a letter from the kid and he's as proud as punch. And don't forget to give Duncan's cook's mate a quid and charge it to me."

"Very good. Anything else?"

"If Duncan asks you how it happened the *Farquah* didn't get my shipment—you don't know anything about it. *Savez?*"

Anderson did not even smile. He merely nodded gravely and asked—

"Do you want the *Gana-Gana* to come alongside the wharf?"

"Hell, no! She'd smash it flat. Use our surfboats. Duncan's a friend of mine."

Anderson bowed.

"And the wharf? Hadn't we better get the Accra carpenter to begin work at once?"

"I'm borrowing a pile driver from

Bwallatown," Balloch mumbled from the folds of the bath towel. "It's an old fashioned thingamajig, but it does the work and it should be on the *Gana-Gana*. If it is, you can put the carpenter to work one time. Better get that chop of mine on board my canoe. I'm leaving in half an hour."

"Liquor?" Anderson queried briefly.

"No. Nothing."

Anderson's head jerked back as if Balloch had hit him.

"Ye—yes, sir," he said in confusion and went out.

Less than half an hour later Balloch was heading downriver and from the glistening blades of eight paddles, glittering drops of water were flinging stabbing lights into his eyes—eyes that stared fearfully and incredulously into the immediate future, as he tried not to think that Kingdon had gone back on him.

There was a grass awning over the mat covered deck of the canoe amidships and presently, when he had passed Preston's beach and had waved a salute in the general direction of Preston's main wharf, Balloch sprawled upon the little deck with his sun helmet covering his face.

FOR two days and two nights, unless he was lucky enough to shorten the trip by picking up a launch or a freighter bound for Benin River, Balloch knew he would be alone with the eternal mangroves that crowded in upon him; alone with a new thirst for strong waters that must be denied, and alone with a fear that grew with every rhythmic downward sweep of the canoe boys' paddles.

Kingdon?

Balloch tried to think he was not afraid of Kingdon or of the sudden call to report at Benin River just before Kingdon took passage on the *Farquah* for Calabar. But Balloch knew to the depths of him that he was afraid and that it was not at the prospect of meeting Marquis again.

He had begun his career in the palm oil trade in Benin River and it seemed likely that he was going to end it there. He would not go back to beach clerking. He'd be damned if he would; Kingdon or no Kingdon. He'd resign. He'd tell Kingdon and the African Merchants Company to go to blazes and he'd go aboard the *Farquah* and lick the stuffing out of Marquis all over again just to prove it hadn't been any fluke.

Why should he be afraid of Kingdon? Who was Kingdon anyway? Agent-general for the African Merchants? Well, what of it? Just a little man in a big job. Hunh. He could pick Kingdon up with one hand and—

Balloch figuratively put Kingdon down again very carefully and begged his pardon.

"What I need," he mumbled apologetically to the little man from beneath his sun helmet, "is a drink. I'm just a ruddy sap without my liquor."

There were two days and two nights of this. For Balloch did not sleep very much. And even at the African Merchants Bwallatown factory, where he shipped a fresh crew of paddleboys and might have supplied himself with his favorite brand of Scotch, he refused the Bwallatown agent's invitation to late breakfast ostensibly because he was traveling against time, but principally to avoid the necessity of denying himself the several cocktails that constitutionally preceded the meal.

On the morning of the third day, the red, yellow and blue and dazzling white of the Benin River trading factories injected their splashes of color into the dead monotony of the mangroves; and presently, as the roofs of the African Merchants storehouses appeared to rise out of an early morning haze that was rolling out to sea, Balloch saw a big black hulled freighter swinging at anchor in the swift racing swirl of midstream.

It was the *Farquah*.

Trading beach surfboats with palm oil, rubber or palm nut kernels were already crowding the freighter's black

sides and were hanging on grimly to the ratlines to prevent being swept out of their positions of precedence; or they were bucking the treacherous swiftness of the current on the return journey, loaded with everything from bales of print cloth to kegs of gunpowder and diminutive cases of *pâté de foie gras.*

Balloch watched the surfboats with a sullen interest as his canoe headed for the gig wharf. He knew from experience it was no simple trick to run a well loaded surfboat alongside a ship at anchor in the Benin River and keep it there. And when there were mahogany logs to ship, there was likely to be excitement enough for any man's money. Balloch remembered a sixteen-ton log that had been just a trifle too much log for the tackle of the old *Dakar* . . .

"No!" Balloch exploded suddenly and quite audibly. "No more of that sweating grind for me! I'm heading back to Dannatown tonight or I'm heading out of this hell hole for good. *Savez?*"

The paddleboys paid no attention to him. They had grown accustomed, as had their predecessors, to hearing this big white man talk to himself in his own tongue; and they knew that what he needed most was a drink of *tomba* or its equivalent out of a white man's bottle. So they ran his canoe alongside the African Merchants gig wharf, hoping he would relieve his own thirst and remember that paddling all through the night made a paddleboy's throat very dry

Balloch did not forget. He tore a leaf from a small notebook, scribbled a few words on it and handed it to the crew headman.

"Go for shop and catch chop and li'l bit gin. *Savez!*"

The headman understood nothing in life half so well as an order of this sort, and Balloch, with a grimly twisted smile upon his rather pallid lips, stepped ashore and strode up the concrete path leading to the white men's quarters above the shop.

On the way he looked neither to right nor left and ignored the greeting of a native oil trader who solemnly saluted him from the main wharf. A white man with a large bunch of keys hanging from the clip of his belt emerged from the oil yard at the back of the beach, but he was not the white man Balloch was looking for, so Balloch went right on and up the stairs to the house veranda.

The agent's office and living quarters were on the right of the stairway; the white assistants on the left. There was no sign of Cromer, the agent, on the veranda; and no sign of Kingdon either. The assistants were down on the beach and a houseboy, balancing a tray, passed Balloch and scuffed his barefooted way downstairs in search of the particular beach clerk who depended upon him for early breakfast.

Balloch strode along the veranda until he stood in the doorway of Cromer's office. Cromer was not there. But Kingdon, at Cromer's desk, was chipping the shell of a boiled egg and apparently was taking some pains to make an even job of it.

He looked up as Balloch entered, came at once to his feet and held out his hand.

"Hello, Balloch. Glad to see you. You have made very good time. Did you get a lift anywhere along the line?"

Balloch shook hands. His throat felt thick and dry and his knees had a weak and sinking feeling in them. He heard himself speak and wondered where the words came from; and as he looked down upon the quiet little man across the desk, he tried to think that his fear of him was just a lot of ruddy foolishness.

"No. I just changed crews and kept 'em at it. How—how are you? You're looking fit."

"Thanks, Balloch. You are just in time for breakfast. But I imagine you'd like something to drink first. Just a moment till I call a houseboy."

"No—no liquor." Balloch said hoarsely and sat down on the edge of a couch. "Coffee and toast'll be all I'll want. And don't—don't let your eggs get cold bothering about me. Cromer sick?"

Balloch knew the question was abrupt. He knew his whole manner was strained and hard. It had to be. He wasn't going to let Kingdon think he was afraid of him or that he cared about what he was going to say or do to him.

KINGDON called a houseboy, ordered Balloch's breakfast and then sat down to his own.

"Cromer went home last week," he said quietly. "Invalided."

"Cromer! I thought he never took sick."

"He's been sick for some time, but wouldn't admit it. So I sent him home for awhile to recuperate." A pause. "When he comes back, he'll probably go to Lagos. We need a man like Cromer in Lagos."

Balloch nodded mechanically.

"Yes. Cromer's a good man. Very good. Just the right man for Lagos."

"I think so, too," Kingdon said simply. "And I sent for you to have you take Cromer's place here. Is that perfectly satisfactory?"

"*Me!*" Balloch came to his feet as if he had been shot out of a gun.

"Why not? You know Benin River and Benin River seems to remember you very well."

"The river?"

"I mean the native traders hereabout haven't forgotten you. I think they'd like to welcome you back."

"Me. But—but—" Balloch stumbled and stopped there. His glance shifted sharply toward the river, and through the fronds of a palm he saw the *Farquah* plainly. His throat felt thicker and drier than ever. "I—didn't know," he mumbled and tried to look Kingdon in the eyes. "It's—I mean Murray and I—you know? Murray of the *Farquah* —and Marquis—they—er, I mean—mean it's ruddy white of you to give me this chance."

"Not in the least." Kingdon's voice and eyes were very quiet and told nothing at all. "You're just the man for this job."

Balloch looked down at his feet and rubbed his perspiring palms on his trousers. He was chilly one moment and warm the next, and beneath all this was a fear that surged upward from the very roots of him. If Kingdon did not know about the fight with Marquis; if he found out about it later when he boarded the *Farquah* for Calabar . . .

"Speaking of Murray," Kingdon said, and the sound of his voice was like a monkey wrench thrown into the whirring machinery of Balloch's thoughts, "I understand he has a touch of fever and that Marquis will come ashore for these bills of lading." Kingdon indicated a sheaf of ship's papers with his spoon. "Possibly in time for eleven o'clock breakfast. I suppose that's all right with you?"

"With me!" Balloch looked somewhat like a fish on a hook. "Why should—why—if you've invited him, that's always all right with me."

Kingdon nodded and emptied his coffee cup as a houseboy entered with Balloch's meager breakfast. Clearing a space for the tray on the desk, Kingdon rose and said with a slight smile:

"Better sit here and get accustomed to this chair. It's yours from now on, you know."

Balloch hesitated and tried to moisten his dry lips with a dryer tongue.

"Thanks," he said hoarsely, and moved around the desk on leaden feet while Kingdon, to all appearances, gave all his attention to the business of filling his pipe.

"I don't imagine you slept any too comfortably in the canoe," Kingdon said just as Balloch gingerly took possession of the Benin River agent's desk chair. "So if you'd rather go to bed and not bother about eleven o'clock breakfast, I'll take care of things for you."

Balloch stiffened and his chin came up with a jerk. His perspiring hands took a spasmodic grip upon the arms of the chair; just as if he expected to be exploded out of it at any moment. Before he could say anything, however, King-

don asked mildly—

"How is the new wharf at Dannatown coming along?"

Balloch gulped and swallowed hard and there followed a heavy and hollow pause. Nevertheless he managed to mumble something about a pile driver and Bwallatown and the *Gana-Gana* and vaguely hoped Kingdon was able to make some sense out of it.

Evidently Kingdon did; at least he dropped the subject as abruptly as he had brought it up and, when he had lighted his pipe, he strolled to the door leading to the veranda. Balloch's eyes followed him and the coffee and toast remained untouched.

"Is Preston still up at Dannatown?" Kingdon asked, strolling back again.

Balloch's hand reached blindly for a piece of toast and almost upset his coffee.

"Yes. He's still up there."

"Preston's a good man," Kingdon said. "He has a good level head." A pause as Kingdon puffed slowly on his pipe. "Just a trifle too level sometimes perhaps. A little sentiment now and then goes a long way, even out here. Don't you think so?"

"I—I suppose it does," Balloch agreed hesitatingly, and wondered what Kingdon was driving at now. "But Preston, he isn't so hard."

"No?" Kingdon puffed on the pipe again thoughtfully. "Still, just as a case in point, do you think Preston would be sentimental enough to risk the displeasure of one skipper simply to hold a shipment for another skipper who had delivered a parrot to his younger brother at home?"

Balloch's eyes popped wide.

"A—a parrot! It was a monkey! My mother said the kid could have a monkey when he was ten, and Duncan of the *Gana-Gana* promised he'd see to it that he got it."

Kingdon smiled.

"A monkey, was it? I understood Duncan to say, when the *Gana-Gana* was here ten days ago, that it was a parrot. But I must have been mistaken."

Balloch stared and, as he stared, courage leaped through his veins in a surging flood. Kingdon knew! And Kingdon didn't give a damn! In that quiet, uncanny way of his, Kingdon had pieced together the whole story and then had brought him down to Benin River and set him in Cromer's chair! This, with the *Farquah* lying in midstream.

Balloch found himself upon his feet wondering why he had been afraid. He supposed it was because he was tired; and he was tired—suddenly and godawful tired.

"I think I'll take your advice and go to bed," he said, brushing his forearm across his eyes. "If you'll wake me before eleven."

Kingdon nodded.

"I think that's wise. The bedroom's right behind you."

"Thanks," Balloch grunted, and lurched toward the bedroom doorway. "About ten-thirty or a few minutes before should be all right."

He reached the doorway, then stopped and turned, feeling that he could trust the little man with anything.

"What's the meaning of the word sub—sublimated?"

"Glorified. Noble. Pertaining to the sublime. Why?"

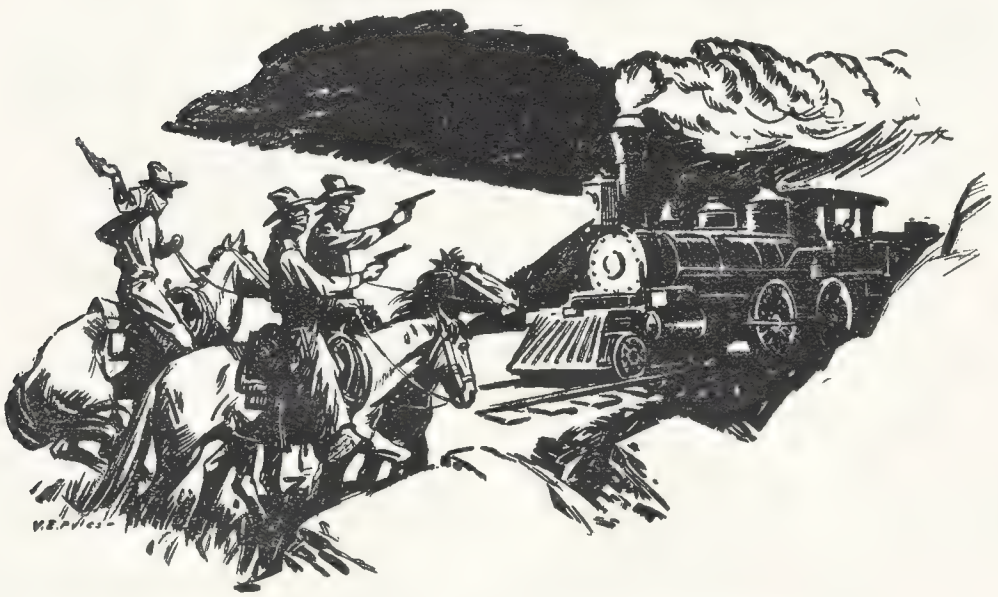
Balloch's brows furrowed.

"Hunh. I must have got the wrong word," he said wearily, and disappeared into the bedroom.

In two minutes he was fast asleep.

STRICTLY LEGAL

By WILLIAM CORCORAN



A Story of the Range Trails

THE broad, shaded porch of the business establishment of A. Solomon—General Merchandise, Guns & Ammunition, U. S. Post Office—was to Valverde town in its frontier day at once an inviting nook by the wayside, a busy mart and a solemn civic forum. In its shelter this noontime was gathered at one end the entire municipal government in grim conclave; and at the other a spectacle of marked contrast: a white mustached, immaculate old settler who sat genially whittling, his feet perched high on the railing before him, while a great, shaggy vagabond of a dog lolled alongside and periodically gave his silky tail a single wag to indicate that his present withdrawal from Valverde affairs was but temporary and need occasion no serious concern or curiosity.

The government of Valverde, Kansas, so casually convened on A. Solomon's porch, was composed of Mayor Peters, who violated all custom by being both fat and sharp tongued, Sheriff Maddock, towering, ungainly and grim, Judge Parks, short and pompous and filled with dour unction, and heavy jowled Gil Watson, who ruthlessly bossed both the county commission and the town council.

Their united gaze fell upon a lean, gray eyed young man who stood before them in smoldering, tight lipped anger. The young man's face and the young man's garb, plain and honest and comfortable, showed signs of hard and prolonged service on the Texas cattle trail.

He was a cowhand, one might reasonably judge, who knew his trade thoroughly, from horns to hock. By his speech he was a native Texan. In the road beside the porch a camp wagon waited, loaded with supplies and ready to depart. The driver silently looked on.

The old settler blandly listened while he whittled the stick, sending an occasional glance toward the group as he absorbed the import of the discussion.

"I've got to bring the herd into the county," the young man was saying with desperate insistence. "They're a day's drive south, Montana bound and six weeks on the trail. The creeks are dry and they've got to reach water. If they don't I'll have three thousand crazy steers on my hands. I don't dare drive around the county. And, by Godfrey, I'm bringing them in!"

"Of course you are," Gil Watson said urbanely. "The only water within driving distance is inside the county. And we want them in. We'll serve the papers of attachment as soon as they're all inside the county limits and give you a legal receipt for the herd. Your responsibility will end there. You've done a good job and your employer down in Texas won't have a word to say against you for it."

"You're damn tootin' he won't!" roared the young man, goaded by the patronizing tone. "He trusts me, that's the reason. By the eternal tornadoes, if I let you highbinders take that herd away from me, I'll be letting him down. And I don't intend to. I'm driving those cattle straight through to the Little Big Horn. I've got twelve tough Texas brush fighters along with me, and any deputy coming within a mile of my camp with any kind of papers is running the risk of being skinned alive." He thrust a furious finger at Watson. "As for you, you old pirate, let me see you serving those papers personal. I'll pin those dewlaps to the back of your neck and freeze a grin on your ugly map."

The young man suddenly stopped speaking. Sheriff Maddock was rising to his feet, frowning and formidable. He looked at the speaker. With long, slow strides he walked up to the young man and stopped before him.

"D'you want to spend the next few days in the lockup and let that herd come through without you?" he inquired with slow harshness.

The young man did not reply. His very limbs trembled with fury, and his elbow was crooked as though irresistible muscular reaction were impelling him to clutch at the gun holstered against his thigh.

"If you do," went on the sheriff, "just let that tongue of yours ramble on a little further like that. You're guilty of contempt of court right now, my lad, and all I need is a word from Judge Parks to jug you for it. And don't get the notion that gun'll help you any either."

The young man backed away. He stood with feet apart, knees slightly bent, his face ugly with passion.

"You gang of rustlers!" he snarled between clenched teeth. "You ain't got a claim against the Circle Dot that has a leg to stand on in an honest court. You all are working hand in glove. You aim to get possession of those steers and ruin them. Well, you ain't going to do it, by Godfrey! I'm driving through to the Little Big Horn and heaven help the man that tries to stop me!" He spun about in his tracks. "Gid," he ordered the man on the wagon seat, "tell Abe Solomon I want some more supplies. Get inside and tote them along. Two hundred rounds extra of Winchester shells per man and two hundred more of .45's. Come on, tear yourself loose from that seat and get them out here!"

The wagon driver leaped from the seat with alacrity and bounded to the porch and into the store. The young trail foreman glared at the government of Valverde and strode inside after him. The government of Valverde exchanged significant, ominous glances.

Across the porch the old settler now

accompanied his labors with a tune, whistling discordantly and humming with contentment as he held out his stick for critical inspection. Not a word was uttered on the porch for some time. Sheriff Maddock, after a moment, cocked a puzzled eye toward the old fellow whose whistling was so audible in the quiet, and then looked questioningly at his companions.

They all peered at the old-timer, but only shook their heads blankly in negative reply to the question. They did not know him. Nor, one might judge, did they care to. Just another garrulous old fool whose existence was of supreme inconsequence to men of weighty, if delicate, affairs. Valverde, in trail season, was jam full of relics of the early days just after the Civil War, and their pernicious habit of launching into detailed and boastful reminiscences on the slightest provocation could be as exasperating as the hives.

In a few moments the two Circle Dot men emerged from the store. The driver bore two weighty packages which he deposited beneath the tarpaulin with the other supplies. The young foreman strode past the government of Valverde and loosed a rangy black horse at the hitch rail. He snapped a command at the wagon driver, swung into the saddle, and led the way up the street toward the open prairie. At this hour, life in Valverde proceeded at a pace demanding a minimum of exertion, and the wagon had the rutted roadway to itself. It creaked and rumbled on its deliberate way and presently passed out of sight.

The old settler completed his labors on the little slab of pine. He snapped shut his jack-knife and regarded the finished product with satisfaction. It bore unmistakable resemblance to a fresh white bone, even though it might have lacked the finer shadings of a true work of art. The old settler spoke to the dog at his side, exhibiting the trophy.

"How's that, old citizen?" he demanded with complacent triumph. "I bet you ain't ever buried a sweeter bone in all your days. Let's see you fetch it."

The shaggy vagabond sniffed at the object, incurious but mindful of his obligations toward strangers in Valverde, and then watched it sail off as the old settler tossed it from the porch far to one side. He stood up, observed its landing, looked at the old settler and, in response to the latter's urgings, finally decided to humor his mood and chase the counterfeit. His whole being abruptly entered into the game and with a furious barking and a great slithering leap he set off across the porch and over the yard alongside the store.

The old settler grinned at the government of Valverde in a vaguely friendly manner and, bringing his feet to the floor, ambled off after the dog in benign contentment.

Mayor Peters grunted in disgust as the old fellow passed from sight, and turned to Judge Parks to resume their lately interrupted consideration of certain matters of closely related financial and legal aspects.

TWENTY minutes later the young foreman, his face still marked with cold, grim fury, followed the gently winding road over a crest of grassy prairie. The town was a mile behind him. On the other side of the slope, resting beneath a small hackberry tree, sat the old settler. A horse grazed nearby, and the shaggy vagabond sprawled beside the old fellow, panting enthusiastically. The old settler had found a new pine slab and was at work on it, whistling the while. The young Texan drew rein and looked at him as if wondering where he had seen him before.

The old settler grinned.

"Howdy, son," he said. "Been waiting for you to come along."

He had keen blue eyes and a face that was clean and pink and white, the face of a man who had lived well but had never in a lifetime gone soft. His frame was sparse, and his years rested lightly on it. His hands, working with the

knife, were deft and sure. He looked like a veteran who had amassed his competence and was thoroughly enjoying a free and secure old age.

"Waiting for me?" repeated the young foreman. "Didn't I see you back there in Valverde?"

"I didn't think so at the time, you had so much else to occupy your mind," said the old fellow. "But I was there on the porch all the while. I flung my stick for this kiyoodle to chase after, and then I followed him out of sight and forked my horse and rode out here along the creek bottom. I didn't want to be seen."

The young rider ordered the wagon to wait and walked his horse over to the hackberry. He dismounted and sat on his heels before the old man, racking his brain for a likely clue.

"Why didn't you want to be seen?" he asked suspiciously.

The old fellow cocked a critical eye at his carving.

"Well," he said, "I got no particular business meddling in other folks' affairs. But I heard you mention the Circle Dot. If your herd is Circle Dot cattle then you're driving for old Pete Hamlin. And I come up the trail from Texas with Pete as long as twenty years ago."

"Oh," said the young foreman, "you did, eh? What's the name?"

"It wouldn't signify especially. I was known as Hackamore them days. Ain't been south in well over ten years. Look here, son. What sort of racket are those crooks running on you anyway? Tell me about it."

The Texan looked at the old fellow keenly. He played his quirt through the grass a moment, then suddenly decided to trust him. No harm could be done in any case. He sat more comfortably on the sandy earth, gripping his hands around his knees. He was desperate and in need of talk.

"My herd," he explained, "is due for delivery on the Little Big Horn early in September. It's contracted to some woman rancher, name of Taney. It's the primest stuff ever come out of Texas, if I do say so. It was a hard drive, but I been nursing them, and they average better than five hundred on the hoof right this minute."

"Pete Hamlin never delivered a poor herd in his life," observed Hackamore. "Tell me your name, son, before you go any farther."

"Morgan. Dave Morgan."

"Morgan. Good Texas name. Go right ahead, son."

"The trouble is this," said young Morgan. "Gil Watson's been holding a grudge against my boss for a long time. Pete Hamlin outsmarted him in that rickety cattle market two years back. He's wanted to get even—and he finally found a way. He's made up out of thin air a claim for three thousand dollars against Hamlin. It's for watering charges last season. We watered a herd at a nester's spring on the Salt Flats. The nester wanted ten cents a head: three hundred dollars. We paid him thirty dollars, as being a fair compromise on a holdup pure and simple. Gil Watson heard about it and bought in on the nester's claim some way so that he's suing in the courts for a settlement —at one dollar a head, three thousand dollars."

Hackamore was amazed.

"He's crazy!" he exclaimed. "No jury in the land will award him three thousand for watering a herd. No jury of cowmen would give him one cent."

"He's *not* crazy," Dave Morgan said grimly. "He's cunning as a coyote. He don't expect to win any suit at law. But with his crony Judge Parks issuing the papers of attachment, he aims to get his hands on that herd. It's prime Panhandle stuff, remember, worth on to ninety thousand dollars in Montana in the open market if it holds. If Gil Watson, through Judge Parks, gets control of the herd, he will be holding a gun again Pete Hamlin's temple."

"Just how, son?"

"That herd, Hackamore, is contracted to the Little Big Horn," Morgan explained in baffled wrath, "but until le-

gal delivery is established, with the buyer inspecting the herd and accepting a bill of sale, it still belongs to Hamlin.

Pete Hamlin could sell it and deliver any other herd to Montana in its stead—providing he cared to, and could move another herd up there in time, which he can't. If he don't deliver as per contract, he forfeits his bond, the money laid down to guarantee his delivering the stuff. Now, Gil Watson, once the herd is seized, will dicker to buy it from my boss. He'll set a price that will be plain ruin. And if my boss won't sell, Gil Watson will dry graze that herd until he's ruined it anyway. He can throw it on the alkali flats, let it stampede all over the State, drive it back and forth to hell an' gone, keep it from water for days—and when the courts finally turn down his claim, hand it back to Pete in a condition such that it never can be sold. My boss is facing complete ruin every way, and it's up to me to drive those cattle through this county if I have to stand off the U. S. Cavalry to do it!"

The old settler ceased whittling. He looked off into the distance where the heat mirages played over the prairie, and his blue eyes were reflective, calculating.

"He's sure and certain got you and old Pete backed in a corner, son," he said. "And while this Judge Parks presides over the local court I reckon there's no legal way out."

"Gil Watson's been a little tin god around these parts a long time," the Texan said between clenched teeth. "He's got this country crawling on its belly before him and burning incense to his image. Well, I come from a tougher section, where they burn gunpowder to little tin gods like him. We'll see how he likes the aroma when I cross the county line a little after dawn tomorrow morning."

The old settler moved with sudden alacrity.

"Let me ride along with you, son," he said. "I ain't much use any more in cases like this, but I got nothing better to do. I'd like to look them cattle over. I ain't seen a herd on the trail in a coon's age and these old eyes are craving the sight once again."

Morgan got up. He courteously urged the old fellow to come along. He had accomplished nothing by talking, but he felt a little better. He was in for serious trouble and there was no escape; putting the fact into plain words made it somehow easier to face. He was grimly determined, even though deep within him his soul sickened at the bloody ordeal he must impose upon his men, gay and gallant fellows who wrought Herculean labors for thirty dollars a month and found, and whose loyalty thirty thousand could not buy.

The shaggy vagabond dog, astutely concluding that the sudden activity was preliminary to a departure for points new and interesting, roused to fervent activity also. He raced around in circles, barking and pausing occasionally to make acquaintance with Dave Morgan's saddlehorse and the wagon team.

OLD Hackamore, if he was at all cast down by the calamity facing an old friend, showed no sign of it. He chatted amiably as they rode along the prairie road. Dave Morgan looked at him and wondered at the extent to which trivialities absorbed old men. This Hackamore was sure a fine looking old specimen; must have been a regular firebrand in his day. And the old settler was, in all truth, an appealing figure. There was a naïve, simple dignity about him, a shrewd intelligence in his eye, that made his garrulous humor seem at times suspiciously like a mask worn to mislead the world.

Hackamore reminisced at length about the old trail days. He had first come up from Texas in '67. He had fought Indians, he had hunted buffalo, he had weathered the storm and turmoil of a lifetime, and now, full of brightly colored years, he had relinquished his tasks to younger hands. He spoke proudly of his financial independence, and with

even greater pride of his family. He had married late, reared his brood to maturity, and when he passed on they would be left in comfort.

He showed Dave a daguerrotype of his eldest, and Dave, glancing casually at it, became suddenly very interested in the old settler's family. The picture was of a young woman of unmistakable charm. There was unmistakable character in her portrait too. The girl stood on a ranch-house porch in riding clothes, a wisp of hair blowing in the prairie wind, erect and firm-bodied and assured, smiling a frank, likable smile. The little portrait represented much of the substance of young Dave's dreams, and it was, for a trail driving, homeless cowboy, something as remote and unattainable as the moon.

The wagon delayed their pace, but they reached camp well in time for supper. The *segundo* had halted the herd just south of the county line, in a broad, low brown bowl of a valley, and the cattle were already bedded down, dry and suffering. The outfit was on its toes, nervous and apprehensive of what the next twenty-four hours might bring. Old Hackamore was casually introduced to the men, and as casually they accepted him. Weightier things than visitors were on their minds. Hackamore ate with them in good appetite, but silently; his garrulous mood was gone. He remained unobtrusively in the background, looking on and missing nothing.

Dave Morgan related the story of his encounter to the outfit and told them of his decision to invade the county and to fight their way through to its northern border. None of them offered comment; compromise or delay did not even occur to them as alternatives. They had hired on for a certain job, and they were going to see it through.

Before dark, Morgan and his quaint new friend rode out to the bed ground and inspected the herd. The shaggy vagabond was left behind, tethered to the cook wagon and contentedly gnawing on a bone. Gingerly the two men walked their horses through the scattered cattle. Both were quiet and somber in mood; the old man was too much a cowman to remain insensible to the suffering endured by the thirsty beasts. The brutes were restless; gaunt eyed and pitiful, they lay down only to rise again and stand sniffing the hot wind and moaning their need. This was their second day without water; tomorrow they must reach a supply or inevitably the trail would take its toll.

"They're grand looking animals, the poor critters," old Hackamore observed. "For a season like this one, you've brought them through in fine shape."

"The worst is done and over, or will be after tomorrow," said Morgan. "Once through this trouble and we'll have nothing to worry about. There's plenty of water reported north of here."

The old man was silent for a time.

"Look here, son," he said suddenly. "I hatched an idea. I think maybe something could be done."

Dave Morgan looked at him. There was a new note in his voice, crisp and to the point. Hackamore's senility fell from his shoulders like a discarded cloak. Dave's eyes narrowed, watchful of what the change might portend.

"I don't hold much by legality in large doses," said Hackamore. "Like licker and love, legality serves them best as can take it or leave it alone. This process of law invoked in Valverde is a perversion of justice, so I reckon we might do a little perverting on our own account without upsetting our consciences."

"Consciences!" snorted Dave Morgan. "This outfit lost all its scruples and tender feelings in the flood waters of the Red River weeks ago."

"That's fine," the old man said complacently. "Then we can proceed without mincing matters."

"As how?" snapped Morgan.

"As like this—providing you will place full confidence in me," said Hackamore. "I'm going to tell you what to do, and you'll do it and no questions. You can

refuse if you like, but I'm advising you not to."

"You suggest anything, short of leaving these cattle another day without water, and it'll be done," Morgan asserted.

The old man outlined his plan. He blandly offered no justification for it, but merely instructed Morgan in those developments in which he and the Circle Dot outfit would participate.

"You're familiar with the ranch brand of this cattle outfit you're delivering to, I suppose?" Hackamore asked.

"Yes," said Morgan. "Circle Bar."

"Circle Bar," repeated Hackamore. "One sweep with a redhot iron and the Circle Dot becomes Circle Bar. That right?"

"So I figured. Easy job to do."

"All right. If you get this herd to water tomorrow, could you rebrand it entire by noon?"

Morgan frowned.

"No, I don't reckon that would be possible. It might get done in the course of a full day at top speed."

"Then if you had a big outfit and enough branding chutes you could get it done in half a day," said the old man. "That's fine. I'll see you get the extra hands. I'll send them out of Valverde tonight. They'll meet you in the morning on Squaw Creek inside the county. You'll find an abandoned set of corrals and chutes there in good condition. Get under way before dawn, water your steers as you hit the creek, and run them into the corrals as they come out of the water. They'll all be Circle Bar by dinner time."

"That won't hold water," objected Morgan. "There'll be no proof of delivery."

"Never you mind, son. Do as I say. I'll keep you too busy to stop to worry about things. I also want you to turn bandit and hold up the M. K. & T. westbound about twenty miles outside Valverde two hours before dawn."

"You *what?*" demanded Morgan in consternation.

"Take three of your men with you," went on Hackamore imperturbably. "Save your horses getting there, so you can ride the starch out of them getting back in time to take the trail. All I want you to do is stop the train west of town, make a lot of noise, and sort of by accident turn loose any prisoners you might happen to find in one of the coaches."

"What do I want with prisoners?" asked the dumbfounded Texan.

"Less than nothing, son. I said turn them loose, not rescue them. Your cue is to stage a fake holdup, wearing masks so no one will know you, and to stumble on these prisoners. Being bandits, and consequently in sympathy with lawbreakers, you'd naturally set them free. Insist on it, in fact. Herd them out on the prairie, pretend the holdup is over, and send the train on its way. The conductor will know what to do. When the train is gone, light out of there as fast as you can go, leaving the released prisoners to enjoy their freedom on twenty miles of prairie."

"Look here, Hackamore—" Morgan began in desperation.

"After that," Hackamore continued, ignoring him, "you get back to the herd as fast as you can, drive the cattle north into the county, water them and brand them along Squaw Creek. If they ain't done by noon, you leave the work under way and hit for Valverde anyway. I'll meet you there, and we'll settle the final details. That's all there is to it. You do them things and I'll take care of all the rest."

"Oh, you will!" the young Texan said ironically. He stared at the old man. "Well, I'll be a purple horned toad! And where will I bury the dead after some express messenger with no sense of humor at all opens up on us bold bandits with a couple of double-barreled shotguns?"

"There's no express or mail cars on that night train," said Hackamore, quite undisturbed. "And there'll be no shooting if you steer clear of the women and passengers. There'll be one coach with

prisoners in it, likely the last. Find it, make enough noise so that each coach thinks all the others is being blown to flinders, and get the job over with."

Hackamore looked at the young Texan. There was a cool strength in his bright blue eyes. Presently he spoke again.

"Son," he said softly, "I know what's going on in your head. You're a man and you're holding down a job that calls for a man. You make use of your own eyes and judgment a lot oftener than papers and legalities. Make up your mind right here and now if you're going to stake everything on this, because I ain't going to say any more."

"I trust you, Hackamore," Morgan said slowly. His shrewd judgment of men forced him to believe in the old fellow's sincerity. "But you're asking a hell of a lot, and it sounds so plumb crazy—" He paused, thinking, debating within himself. He knew without further parley that the old fellow would explain no more. "Hell, it may be crazy, but it can't be any worse than fighting our way through the county!" He reached a sudden decision. "I'll play your game, Hackamore. God help us all, and you too, if it don't work. But I'll play your lay to the limit."

"That's what I want to hear, Dave," said Hackamore, smiling. He thrust out a hand. "You can have my word for it that you won't regret. Pete Hamlin's herd is going through, and you're going to take it through."

Dave Morgan said smilingly—

"That's what Pete hired me for."

SOME hours later, after day had gone and darkness had reigned for a time, to be dissipated in turn by the rise of the waning moon, the old settler pulled up his sweating horse at a point where his path intersected two long lines of steel that glistened across the prairie in the moonlight. Sorefooted and wearing an air of bewildered protest, the shaggy vagabond limped up to the spot and halted. The old settler unsaddled the horse and turned it loose to find its way home alone. Then he stood between the rails for some time, looking to the east. Presently a tiny light glowed intermittently on the horizon. Afar, faint and clear, a locomotive whistle sounded.

Hackamore briskly began gathering dry brush and buffalo chips and, stacking them close to the tracks, ignited a small, bright blaze. He found a length of dry wood and, plying his jack-knife blade, whittled one end so that it bore a rough resemblance to a pine cone. Thrust into the fire, the pine cone quickly flamed and became an effective hand torch.

"I reckon this will hold up the wheels of progress long enough to let us climb aboard, old citizen," Hackamore observed to the shaggy vagabond. "Conductor Ben Trade is an old friend of mine, and if he develops any objections I reckon they can be ignored."

The night westbound thundered over the prairie upon them, and Hackamore took a stand between the shining steel rails waving his flaming torch.

The night train always stopped on schedule at Valverde, but rarely to deliver passengers. No one was officially obligated to meet it. Tonight the platform was deserted when the train pulled to a halt before the depot, and old Hackamore grunted with satisfaction as he surveyed the lay of the land from the steps of the last coach. Conductor Ben Trade, a dry, sparse veteran grinning in the dim light, stepped down to the cinders with him. With a panting scramble and a leap, the shaggy vagabond brought up the rear.

"I shouldn't keep you longer than a quarter hour, Ben," Hackamore told the conductor. "Keep your passengers out of this empty coach, and when I show up, you keep out of sight so no one can actually swear you saw me plain enough to identify later."

"I'm risking my job, you old hellion," said Ben Trade. "But it's almost worth it. You'll have to work fast."

"I'm starting now. It's up to you to see there's no interruptions at this end. I'm supposed to be a U. S. marshal in the performance of my duty tonight and I'll handle my end."

"Good luck, Hackamore!"

The old settler scuttled off in the moonlight.

Promptly, with a low bark of eagerness, the shaggy vagabond, scenting adventure, leaped after him. Hackamore abruptly came to a stop.

"Get back there, you old fool!" he ordered. "Nobody asked you along."

The shaggy vagabond skidded to a halt. He looked at the old settler in keen disappointment. Hackamore repeated his order, and Ben Trade called the dog. Crestfallen and chagrined, his mien full of offended reproach, the shaggy vagabond loped back to the coach steps.

The old settler hastened through Valverde town. It was quiet and asleep. Traveling in the roadway, the dust muffling any sound, he went directly to a small, square wooden building fronting on Main Street. The windows of this structure were set with iron bars, and a sign over the front door bore the legend: "Sheriff's Office & County Jail." Hackamore reconnoitered around the building once, and then tried the knob on the front door. It turned, and he entered soundlessly.

Sheriff Maddock slept in a small cubicle alongside his office in the fore part of the building. Two small cells, now empty, took up the rear. Sheriff Maddock awakened from profound slumber this night to find a dim shape bending over him and to experience the eery sensation of a hard, blunt something being thrust into his ribs. He sat up suddenly and his hand shot to the wall at the side of the bunk.

The intruder spoke sharply.

"Don't touch that gun!" he commanded. "This here one can go off a lot quicker. And that would be too bad, Sheriff."

"What the hell's going on?" roared Maddock. "By Jupiter—" A painful gasp closed this brief protest as the hard, blunt gun muzzle dug hungrily into his middle.

"Shut up and do as you're told," whispered the intruder in a voice of hoarse intensity. "Get out of there and get your boots on."

Of old habit, Sheriff Maddock slept in his underwear. He swung from the bunk and reached for the trousers draped over a nearby chair. The intruder repeated his instructions with emphasis. Cursing luridly beneath his breath, the officer abandoned the trousers and slid his feet into the footgear. He stood up. The vigilant gun muzzle bore into the small of his back.

"Now get going," snapped his captor. "Outside and up to the depot."

"Be damned if I will till I know who and why."

The gun muzzle bore grimly into the officer's spine. "Get going, I told you," the intruder repeated.

The sheriff resisted for half a moment, then surrendered with a furious but helpless oath, and moved toward the door. His captor followed. In the office there was a brief wait while the latter secured certain implements essential to his plans. Then they passed out to the street and together stalked up the silent, darkened roadway to the waiting train.

The rear coach was alight and empty. Ben Trade was not in sight when Hackamore drove his prisoner into it and down the aisle. The shaggy vagabond, overjoyed at this quick reunion, ran enthusiastically between their legs until Maddock flailed at him with a furious kick. The dog stopped in the aisle abruptly and fixed the sheriff with a baleful eye, baring his teeth and growling.

"That's the ticket, old citizen," approved Hackamore. "You stand by here and keep an eye on this fellow while I get another one. Take a seat, Sheriff. Anywhere at all."

Maddock very sensibly shrank from the dire threat of the shaggy vagabond, who, sensing the approval in the old

settler's voice, entered into his new rôle with spirit, glaring fiercely and avidly at Maddock's ungainly, scantily draped form. The sheriff sank into a seat, and Hackamore lost no time in applying the handcuffs he had brought along, passing them through the frame of the seat at the side before snapping them shut. Maddock was manacled securely in place, helpless to do more than curse repeatedly in subdued protest.

Hackamore departed into the night and was gone no longer than before. This time he returned with Mayor Peters, who was now but a bulky, craven creature in a ballooning muslin nightgown. Hackamore had stopped at the sheriff's office and secured the county's entire supply of manacles. He dumped them near the door, selected leg irons, and drove Peters into a seat safely removed from Maddock.

He ignored the semi-hysterical threats and warnings of the mayor, and left the two prisoners in charge of the shaggy vagabond, who, to judge from his grimly enthusiastic attitude, hadn't found so thoroughly congenial a game in at least a couple of years. He patrolled the aisle, eyeing the prisoners malignantly and baring his fangs at them. His silky tail lashed to and fro in sheerest pleasure.

Within the designated quarter hour, Hackamore had the government of Valverde securely impounded in the last coach of the night train. They railed, they protested, they gave vent to sulphurous blasphemies—though always, with the shaggy vagabond alertly near, in voices decorously modified. Judge Parks, enveloped in immaculate linen that tripped him as he walked, vowed to see the old settler hanged. Gil Watson, with characteristic directness, vowed that it would be a lynching. Hackamore smiled benignly on them, once his job was completed, and delivered a short and vague, but withal impressive, homily on the deplorable results of greed and the powers and prerogatives of the Federal Government, and then withdrew. Once out of the car, he and the shaggy vagabond jumped quickly down to the cinders.

Ben Trade came out of the shadows.

"Great guns!" he said. "Ain't there no moderation in you, man? Gil Watson? And Judge Parks? What in creation will I do with them?"

"Nothing," assured Hackamore. "Here are the keys to the irons. Just you slow up about twenty miles ouside Valverde and keep an eye peeled for a party of bandits. Look for this Dave Morgan I told you about. Give him the keys, let him turn them loose. Afterward, you might turn loose your gun into the night air and save the day singlehanded. It might give the whole thing the look of an honest to Godfrey holdup."

"Maybe," said Trade. "But they'll see through it. They'll charge me with aiding and abetting an abduction."

"No, they won't, Ben," Hackamore said dryly. "Take my word for it. When this thing is over it ain't likely they'll crave the least bit to air the details."

The train conductor looked at the old settler in the moonlight. He thrust out a hand.

"Hackamore, you old hell-roarer, I ain't got a word to say more. I seen you, during fifteen years or so, amble into plenty trouble and amble out again without a scratch, and I ain't yet seen the time you got tangled in your own loop. I play her as she lays."

The old settler grinned and shook the hand firmly.

"Trouble?" he said. "Ben, us old porcupines knows what the word really is. These youngsters today don't meet half the trouble we run into in the old days."

Ben Trade grinned.

"No," he agreed and, true to his vanishing day, added, "Nor half the fun, Hackamore."

UNIQUE in all Valverde's short history was the day that dawned that momentous morning. Soon after sunup the day's work commenced; the smoke of breakfast fires curled from a hundred

chimneys, freighters roused their teams and hitched up early, swampers cleaned and dressed the saloons for the day's business, the merchants opened their stores, and a few early birds among the cattle traders appeared on the awakening streets. Later the bank opened, the blacksmith's anvil resounded clear and sharp on the morning air, and camp wagons began to roll in from the prairie.

Some one eventually noticed the door of the sheriff's office ajar and idly swinging in the fresh morning breeze. He investigated, found the unmade bed, the undisturbed clothes and personal belongings, and ascertained that Maddock was nowhere in the vicinity. He raised an alarm, and a crowd of puzzled, anxious citizens gathered about the jail.

A messenger, dispatched to inform the mayor of the mysterious disappearance of the peace officer, returned to report that Mayor Peters too had vanished without a trace. A committee dispatched to confer with Gil Watson over this unprecedented state of things, discovered his room in the Valverde House bare and empty. Lastly, Judge Parks' name was added to the roster of the missing. Valverde heard the news and was stunned.

The old settler, aloof but interested, as became one of his years and station, hovered about the milling groups of citizens who tried to solve the several mysteries. The shaggy vagabond accompanied him everywhere, weary but determined not to miss anything. If it were a game, it didn't seem to make much sense. They both got frequently in the way, but no one gave them any notice.

About nine-thirty the old settler drifted away from these scenes of excitement and went to the railroad depot. He conferred with the agent on duty, progressing from a friendly discussion of the weather to other and more delicate topics. They arrived at an understanding which involved the passing of a small sum in gold between the old settler and the agent, and thereafter the telegraph wires hummed with confidential messages which sped between Valverde and points north. In half an hour the old settler had completed his business at the depot, and he retired to a chair on A. Solomon's porch to doze in the shade while the shaggy vagabond snored gently at his feet.

At half an hour past noon, Dave Morgan entered Valverde at a fast lope. His horse was plentifully lathered, and it drooped wanly at the rail when Dave dismounted and tied the reins. Dave himself was a spectacle of worn and grimy young manhood. His eyes were red with weariness and prolonged activity, his cheeks were dark with a stubble of heavy beard, and his clothes were heavy with grayish brown dust. He spied the old settler on Solomon's porch and hastened over.

Hackamore did not stir. He winked at Dave and said softly:

"Don't act like the Injuns were off the reservation again, son. Take a seat and rest a little like nothing at all was on your troubled mind."

Without a word Morgan drew up a chair and relaxed as well as possible. He was in no mood for rest; too much had happened and too many dire possibilities remained ahead. He rolled a cigaret and blew a great cloud of smoke into the light breeze.

"The branding done?" asked the old settler.

"It's done by now. I left the herd on Squaw Creek as ordered, with the chutes fairly smoking. Those fellows you sent out before daylight don't know what's up, but they sure are slick cowhands."

"Plenty of them in town only looking for a job," said Hackamore. "I roused them out easily. How'd the holdup go?"

"Without a hitch. The train stopped soon as it sighted us. We didn't stay long enough to awaken the front cars, but got the keys and turned loose them four crooks *pronto*. They weren't half as surprised as I was at finding who they were. Then we emptied our guns into the air, gave them a few rebel yells, and scattered. The train pulled away like a

jackrabbit. Gil Watson and his three partners were left alone on the prairie before they could get a fair idea what was happening to them."

"They recognize you?"

"No. I'm telling you, Hackamore, they're just talking to themselves somewhere out there and slowly losing their minds trying to figure it all out. I'm close to the same state my own self. What in the living blazes you turning upside down next?"

The old settler got to his feet, a little stiff legged with weariness, but undaunted. He smiled.

"Everything's gone as per schedule, son, so let's get along. We got a little finance to attend to now, and after that we'll be done and finished."

Dave Morgan looked at him uncertainly. Then he rose with a look of determination in his eye. He was learning not to ask questions or expect explanations. The shaggy vagabond stirred, watched the two men depart out of one eye, came to his feet with a logy movement, thought it over, and finally dropped to the floor again to fall into immediate, luxurious sleep. This game, the later details of which became less and less clear to the shaggy vagabond, seemed about over. He was content. He could wait right here.

Hackamore led the way to the Valverde Bank. He outlined to Morgan the startling events of the morning and described the paralyzing mystification which had seized Valverde. Knots of citizens were even yet gathered along the sidewalk waiting bewilderedly for something to turn up; they looked suspiciously at the pair, but no one spoke to them. They walked into the brick building which housed the Valverde Bank, and proceeded past the teller's cage to the little office in the rear, separated by a railing, where the cashier reigned over the finances of Valverde.

Cashier Murchison was a small, nervous man temperamentally suspicious of everything in this world but columns of figures in black ink with totals that double checked. He peered at the two cowmen invading his sanctum without invitation, and frowned in harried fashion. He had spent a frantic morning. The news of the multiple disappearance of the town's foremost citizens had sent him into a frenzied examination of their accounts in search of a possible motive for flight. He found none, but was only the more alarmed. He knew that they should be proceeding with certain important matters in the county this morning.

"Yes?" he said sharply to the old settler. "What is it you want?"

Hackamore eased himself into the chair adjoining the desk. He waved Dave Morgan toward a second chair. He crossed his knees and looked with genial expansiveness at the bank official.

"Well, Mister Murchison," he said, "I reckon we can do a little business this morning. You know about it already, I suspect. It's about that Circle Dot herd."

Dave Morgan's brows shot upward with alert interest, but he said nothing. Murchison frowned even more ominously. His eyes were suddenly sharp.

"The Circle Dot herd," he repeated. "Yes. I've received instructions by wire from a correspondent bank in Willow Springs, Montana, to accept a draft on them for the transfer of the Circle Dot herd to the Circle Bar brand."

"Exactly," said the old settler. Nearby, Dave Morgan's mouth opened as he stared from one to the other of the two men in astonishment. "Now," Hackamore went on, "let's get it done with immediately. I'm the party mentioned as authorized to receive the herd. I've already looked it over and it passes inspection with flying colors. The cattle have been rebranded Circle Bar and there's only the paper detail left."

The cashier was thinking rapidly, glancing from Hackamore to Morgan and back again.

"You are aware," he said, "that certain legal actions have been taken—"

"Yes, and I'm also aware," broke in

Hackamore, "that there's been no service of any kind on that herd. Its title is clear and I stand ready to receive it."

There came a crafty smile on the face of the cashier. He spoke with unction.

"That may well be, Mister—uh—Mister Taney, I think it is?" He cleared his throat. "But I'm afraid there's a little matter of identification to be taken up first. I can't honor on a draft the signature of a man I've never set eyes on before. Couldn't you—ah—arrange to have your identity established beyond reasonable question?"

Hackamore's gaze was equally shrewd.

"Ain't necessary, to begin with. Your instructions by wire specifically mention waiving formal identifications of any kind. You can confirm my draft by wire. I'm registered at the Valverde House as Daniel Taney and there ain't another of that name in town. I've received mail under the name and can prove it. If need be, I could get a wired confirmation of that waiver for you in three shakes of a lamb's tail."

Murchison spread his fingers and joined them at the tips. His gaze wandered to the street window and returned to the old settler.

"Well, in view of the size of this transaction, and considering the fact that the actual owner of the cattle is not present, suppose you do that. You understand, I'm sure. I'm only acting in the interests of all concerned. Simply a formality."

The old settler sat silent for a moment, looking at the cashier.

"Mister Murchison," he said slowly and pointedly, "there seems to be an awful plenty of formality around Valverde these days. Things don't get along under their own power like they used to. I ain't scorning to use new methods, however. I reckon a charge of conspiracy against the cashier of the Valverde Bank, now, might be counted simply a formality in the local courts, but I do entertain doubts about the State superior courts taking it up in that same easygoing light."

DAVE MORGAN watched the two closely, appreciating to the full now the subtle implications of the situation. The banker's services as intermediary were not absolutely essential, but they established beyond question the legality of the sale by accepting a draft on deposit and witnessing the exchange of a bill of sale. Murchison sought to escape from acting in this capacity. So Hackamore was running a bluff on him; and Murchison knew it, and Hackamore knew he knew it, and was undaunted. Hackamore was running it to the limit, and Murchison was sufficiently upset by the morning's mysterious events to feel the ground uneasy beneath his feet. He cleared his throat, dropped his eyes, rattled a paper. He glanced toward the street window and found no comfort there. He shifted in his chair. The silence became painful.

Hackamore spoke softly.

"Don't stall for time hoping to hear from Gil Watson and get your orders," he said. "Gil won't be around to give any for some time. You can count on that, Mister Murchison."

Slowly Murchison executed a smile. No other word could adequately describe the process by which he completed the grimace of false good humor that spread on his red, baffled face. He was dealing with imponderables, with things like Watson's disappearance into thin air and this Daniel Taney's quietly triumphant assurance. He succumbed.

"Well, I reckon it is only a formality, so to speak," he said, "and we can let it go this time. It's irregular and all, but—"

"Certainly!" snapped Hackamore. "We're blunt men of business and time is the essence of the contract. Just get them papers out and we'll fix them up in proper style and close the deal."

Murchison, hiding defeat behind a mask of imperturbability, reached into a drawer for the necessary papers.

Dave Morgan was bursting with questions when the two men resumed their

places on A. Solomon's porch a little later. Hackamore—or Daniel Taney—stemmed the flow with a tolerant, admonishing hand and explained at his own leisure.

"First of all, son," he said, "I reckon you understand exactly what has happened. Pete Hamlin's attachable property is now a piece of paper on deposit at the bank. A court attachment can't hurt money like it can hurt thirsty cattle, so Gil Watson loses his only weapon. He can't win the watering charge case. He won't dare prosecute for abduction for fear of what I might be tempted to do in return. The only thing seriously in danger is Gil Watson's self-esteem, which is so thick skinned I wouldn't worry much."

"I won't," promised Dave. "But never mind the cattle. I reckon I can see all that clearly enough. What I want to know—"

"I'm getting to that," Hackamore said patiently. "About just who is the Circle Bar and such like? Well, the Circle Bar is my daughter Joan. She's the best cowman in Montana. I've made my pile and I craved to drift a little like I did as a youngster before I cashed my checks. I left the Circle Bar in capable hands. Joan ordered a beef herd from Pete Hamlin last Spring, and I decided to run down and trail along with the drive to Montana. I hit town a week ago and got wind of trouble immediate. So I laid low and waited, and then you came along and I learned quick enough what it was."

Dave Morgan nodded, but the puzzled frown did not clear.

"How come," he wanted to know, "you didn't just announce who you were and take over the herd south of the county line?"

"For the simple reason," said Daniel Taney, "that I'd have been in jail quick as you could say Jack Robinson. Any charge at all would have done for the occasion. Just so long as they kept me behind bars and unidentified until it was too late."

"It was a matter of hours," acknowledged Morgan. "I was pretty desperate. I reckon you're right."

"I had to beat them at their own game and I done it!" Daniel Taney spread his hands in a gesture of finality. The incident was closed. He looked at Dave Morgan, who sat in deep thought, staring at the floor. "Son," old Taney resumed in a reflective voice, "now that I've taken possession of three thousand head of cattle, I reckon I need a good, lively trail foreman to drive them home."

Morgan gave the old man a quick look.

"And I'm a Texas cowboy with trail experience but no more job," he said gravely.

"Let's make a dicker," suggested old Taney. "I'll hire you on, you and your outfit, and you drive my herd north."

"Done!" said Morgan. "I always did want to see Montana closer."

"I'll see that you do, son," said Taney. Then he added as an afterthought, "And I'd kind of like for you to meet my Joan."

Dave Morgan did not reply. He was looking over the houses of Valverde into the far, deep azure of midday, and his eyes were veiled to conceal his thoughts. Old Hackamore watched him and slowly smiled his contentment.

At their feet, the shaggy vagabond suddenly roused. He looked around, then came to his feet and circled the porch as though in search of something. He went to the edge of the porch and stood looking up the street. Suddenly and without warning he broke into a frenzy of barking and threw his ungainly body from the porch into the dusty street. He established his footing with some difficulty after landing in a skid, and then tore up the roadway in hot pursuit.

Old Taney and young Morgan both got up and leaned over the porch rail. Along the street many other heads peered forth in wonder. The cause of the commotion was instantly to be perceived. Up the street, just entering

town, filed four footstore, wobegone figures attired in tattered garments never intended for the public gaze.

Even as Taney and Morgan recognized them, the four figures, Valverde's government in the saddest array ever it had occasion to assume, broke into a run. Simultaneously they sensed the intentions of the shaggy vagabond, now rapidly closing in on them, and their tender, flagging feet were inspired to new fleetness. They ran, heedless of the ignominy of flight. They flew, and their scanty clothing trailed like pennants in the breeze. They headed for the open door of the county jail and they made it without a second to spare, slamming the jail door after them in the very face of the panting, chagrined vagabond dog, whose clamorous disappointment was echoed in the farthest corners of Valverde town.

Voyageur

By JOHN C. FROHLICHER

HEAR him coming up the stream,
Sunburned voyageur;
The boat is weighted to the beam—
Trade for beaver fur.
Hear him sing: *"Trois beaux canards."*
Strong men are the rule,
Up the river pulling hard—
"En roulant ma boule!"

Through the green spread prairie land
Where the bison throng,
See him on the river sand,
Harken to his song:
"Le fils du roi voyant chassant—"
Straining like a mule—
"Avec un grand fusil d'argent,
En roulant ma boule!"

Gay sashed, he swaggers through the tales
Of labor, dance or fight;
We hear him singing through the veils
That wrap dead day and night—
That laughing, cursing *"Canayen"*,
The foremost of his school—
The river, plains and mountain men—
"En roulant ma boule!"

Beginning

A New Novel by the Author of "Cannibal Nights"

CHAPTER I

BLOW THE MAN DOWN

"COOK!" the captain's voice boomed from the open cabin door.

No reply.

"Cook! You ruddy greaser, are you drunk? Where's the chow?"

Still no response.

"All-Hands-And-Cook!"

The last call fell upon receptive ears.

"Yes, sir!" I shouted. Being on rather intimate terms with the captain, I added, "I'll be right aft in a minute."

But let it be said right here that I was by no means embodying the entire crew up to the rank of cook. I was the humble second mate. The vessel upon which I filled this berth, and which appeared to be so utterly cookless, was the South Sea trader, the bark *Emma P.*

FULL MOON TIDE

By CAPTAIN RAABE

Those who have read of the famous bark, of her rovings among the South Pacific islands, her encounters with cannibals and blackbirding renegades, surely will remember her skipper, Captain McPurden—Old Mac. They will remember her first mate, the hard fisted Kennedy, who could drink more rum than the entire crew put together. They will remember Bunk, the boatswain, the man who never missed his mark with either pistol or rifle, and Cockney, the boatswain's mate, the little red headed scrapper whose fist was always ready to swing in defense of a pal.

Yes, excepting the dapper Mr. Guerney, the supercargo, they all still belonged to the ship. That fateful evening, however, all, excepting Mac, Kennedy and me, seemed to have gone ashore, bent upon their favorite occupation of painting Sydney's waterfront red. I happened to be the only one on deck. The phrase, All-Hands-And-Cook, which Mac had shouted, had been rightfully applied, for all second mates on board of traders had their nicknames, and All-Hands-And-Cook was mine.

Therefore I replied—

"I'll be right aft in a minute."

"Dammit, I want you right now!" Mac's voice retorted.

Aft I went without delay.

"Where the hell is that cook?" grunted Mac as I slid down the companionway.

"Gone ashore to get culled up, and so's the rest of the crew," was my logical explanation for a deserted galley.

"Huh! Should have known it," snorted Mac, snapping his log book shut. "Account's settled an' the money's burnin' holes in their pockets."

Kennedy stuck his head through his stateroom door.

"What'll we do for skoff now?" he queried, shifting his gaze from the captain to me.

"We'll have to skoff ashore," Mac settled the question. "Waterfront slops for the three of us for at least three days. Never seem to get a decent meal when in port."

Now came the chance to prove myself the redeemer.

"Not a bit of it," I protested. "I was just going to the galley to make some slumgullion for the three of us marooned mariners."

Mac gave an imitation of a man about to faint. He slumped down in his chair so that the tortured piece of furniture creaked. Kennedy slunk back into his room, started to fumble among his shore clothes, humming:

"One day I was passing through Slumgullion Street,
Heave away-ay, blow the man down."

"You—what?" gasped Mac, as if I had reported that I was setting the ship on fire.

"Making slumgullion," I retorted. "You want to eat, don't you?"

"By the Lord!" Kennedy exploded. "Now we *will* eat ashore. My stomach may be copper lined, but copper can't stand everything. I ain't ready to meet my Maker yet. Too many sins to repent before I lay me down."

I was racking my brain for a cutting rejoinder, but:

"Come on; come on, Kennedy," Mac urged, rushing toward his room. "This is gettin' serious. Circular Quay sweepin's will be a feast after that scare."

That was piling it on a little too thick.

"You go to the devil, the both of you," I growled, retreating toward the deck.

"You'll go there sure if you skoff any hash of your own makin'," the two exploded with a single thought.

"On squarin' day at that," Kennedy added. "A bloke stayin' on board, eatin' —heaven help me! Say, are you savin' up to get spliced?"

That was too much. I stopped, weakened, then rushed back into the cabin.

"I'll be with you fellows in a minute. Just give me time to get into my shore plunts."

NO SOONER had we entered a side street leading off the waterfront when we heard the strains of "Blow The Man Down" come in a badly cracked voice from the partly open door of a disreputable pub. The would-be singer was accompanied by a most offensively squeaky accordion. Kennedy sniffed his disgust, but before he could put it into words, the sorry music stopped abruptly, the door banged wide, and a dilapidated individual, followed by the offensive accordion and a greasy black cap, landed almost at our feet.

"Don't blame them for chuckin' that cull," Kennedy grunted. "Who wants to listen to that chantey when ashore, after hearin' the likes of it for six months at sea."

"Yeah," Mac agreed. "I felt like hittin' you with a chair when you started it awhile ago on board."

Kennedy chuckled.

"An' then you had to slack off your spite by pokin' fun at the chow All-Hands wanted to make."

We sauntered on, deciding where to go. Suddenly—*Bang!*—on the other side of the street a door flew open. Once more some pub's unwanted customer lay sprawled upon the pavement.

"Say, this is house cleaning day," I laughed.

"Looks that way," said Mac. "But if there's one more comin' that way I'll say it's an omen."

We were approaching Boxtry Dave's, the renowned dive which some years before had been indirectly responsible for my joining Mac's crew. Now something caught our eyes which could not well be passed up by thirsty mariners on a sultry day. A large lettered sign stared us in the face!

THE ONLY ICED DRINKS IN SYDNEY

"Wow!" emitted Mac. "Just because

some squarehead's come in with a cargo of ice, Dave's got to make us believe he bought some of it. Come on. Let's investigate."

Then the omen appeared . . .

We started for the door; were about to enter when something catapulting through it almost bowled us over.

"Number three!" Mac shouted gleefully, while we were staggering backward.

As we regained our balance the catapulted object revealed itself to be a most disheveled looking derelict, hatless, wearing a badly soiled linen suit. Before he sprawled at our feet, he turned an almost complete somersault, and cut his scalp on a paving stone. Drunk, no doubt, but apparently not altogether devoid of worldly goods, for after him came a package wrapped in soiled newspaper which clattered like a broken earthenware dish when it struck the pavement.

The incident, so common on the waterfront, would have provoked no more than our mirth, had it not been the third in an almost uninterrupted series on the same street. And then the man himself acted so differently from the average ejected undesirable. Instead of shaking his fist at the door which he had passed through in such undignified fashion and raising his voice in opprobrious vituperation, he mournfully shook his head and moaned—

"Oh, Lord, what a world!"

Kennedy felt sorry for the poor fellow. He gripped him beneath the armpits and helped him to a sitting posture, then handed him his package. Without a word of thanks the man reached for it, rather eagerly for one so much under the influence of liquor. At once he felt the contents with deft fingers, then, to our disgust, he started to bawl like a child.

A crying drunk! Something more than we could stand. We were about to turn away, when the derelict's voice arrested us.

"It's broken, it's broken!" the fellow whimpered. "The dirty dogs! I'd like to—"

"Heave to!" Mac bellowed. "What's broken? What they been doing to you?"

The man looked up with watery blue eyes. The tears had made furrows down his unwashed, unshaven cheeks, a sight most revolting when seen on the face of a man. Yet there was something about that face which made it differ from the type generally possessed by men who make a forced exit from the doors of dives.

Haggard and emaciated from prolonged fasting it was. Flabby bags were under the eyes. No doubt there had been a good deal of dissipation. And yet it took but a glance to convince one that not so very long ago the owner of that face had been a stranger to those toughest of dives.

The man's body, too, had shrunk so that his soiled clothes hung on him like bags. And his clothes, begrimed and worn as they were, were nevertheless of a texture not often found on men who had landed in that neighborhood by choice.

"It's broken," the man whimpered once more with a fresh outburst of tears. Then, as if to convince us of the truth of the statement, he started to unwrap his package. His trembling fingers fumbled clumsily. Tremblingly, as if afraid that his unsteady hands might augment the damage, he removed layer after layer of the crumpled paper. We watched him with amusement mingled with disgust. But when the contents were revealed we gasped with amazement.

The pieces of a broken shell of a pearl mussel, which measured nearly a foot in length, dropped out of the wrapping!

"Hell's bells!" ejaculated Kennedy. "Man, where an' how did you get hold of that?"

Instead of answering, the poor wretch surrendered to another fit of crying.

"Can't get nothing for it now," he moaned. "I tried to sell it to the bloke in there, but the blighter didn't give

me a chance to show it."

Mac caught Kennedy's eye.

"Something behind this worth lookin' into," he said through the side of his mouth. "The poor devil's half starved. Let's take him inside an' chow him up. Maybe we'll hear something."

He shook the whimpering derelict by the shoulder.

"Come on, brace up. You're goin' in with us to get some chow an' a drink."

The man stared at Mac as if he had addressed him in some unfamiliar language. Suddenly he seemed to sober up.

"Not in that joint," he protested with a shudder. "Those blokes in there—"

"Nobody'll bother you while you are with us," Mac retorted, jerking the man to his feet. "You pick up your junk an' come with us."

And like the great oak which from a little acorn grew, the strangest adventure man could live through grew from this casual meeting on Sydney's waterfront. It happened in the late Seventies, when the freelance traders were still roaming the South Seas.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE YARN

WE SELECTED a table in a quiet corner. Our newly made acquaintance proved that Mac had surmised rightly. He was on the verge of starvation. A too luxurious life, youthful follies, had caused his undoing. Thomas Hawley was his name. Tom we called him soon.

During the meal we listened to a brief outline of his career. Jagged it was. He had been an Oxford man. No doubt about that, for even now the marks of refinement were cropping out. And Tom was a man every inch. He blamed no one but himself for the downfall which had landed him on Sydney's waterfront. But as he reached that phase of his story, he became melancholy, and from a few scraps which I dragged from him with difficulty I gathered enough to believe there was a girl somewhere whom Tom was too manly to blame for part of his misfortune.

To brace him up, Mac called for a round of drinks. As the stimulant took effect Tom shook himself out of his depression and switched the subject.

"You've asked me—well, Captain, you want to know where and how I got that shell," he stammered hesitatingly. Mac's searching frown seemed to make him feel uncomfortable. It was with some effort that he finally blurted out, "Well, I stole it."

"I surmised that much," said Mac tonelessly. "Shells like the one you've got ain't found lyin' around on the docks. But where—who'd you steal it from?"

Tom took another sip of his whisky as if he had to build up courage before he could go into more detail. Then—

"From Van Asvelt!" he exploded.

Mac stared his incredulity at Kennedy and me.

"Van Asvelt!" he echoed. "How—have you been in that blackleg's crew?"

The fact that neither of us showed signs of friendship toward Van Asvelt encouraged Tom.

"I was," he admitted; then was quick to add, "but not willingly. He shanghaied me here in Sydney about eight months ago. Made me be his supercargo, but about three weeks ago we came in and I jumped his ship without a bob. That shell was the only thing I could get hold of, and I know damn well that he would have killed me after he got through with me. You seem to know him—I mean the way you jumped when I mentioned his name."

"Know him!" Kennedy rasped, balling his fist. "We know him so well that we would like to meet him on the open sea."

"Then I hope you do," said Tom meaningly. "Only I wish that I could be with you when you do."

At this Mac jumped into action.

"Why not ship with us then? Guer-

ney, my supercargo, has taken his plunts ashore. Marryin' a rich widow in New Zealand. Maybe you could—"

"Oh, I could be of help to you all right." Tom caught on to the offer, tapping the package which lay on the table. "Something like that is just what I was hoping for. I got some figures that I stole out of Van Asvelt's private log book."

He fished a slip of crumpled paper out of one of his pockets.

"Let's see that," I said, snatching the paper from him.

"Those figures I found to be the last entry in his book," Tom explained. "I hope they mean the bearings of the place where this thing came from. We were lying in a lagoon on a small, uninhabited island, but about a mile to the south there was a big, volcanic island. I couldn't get the name of it, though. I think that blackleg, Van, kept such things in his head. Why, he kept the only sextant on board under lock and key. He wouldn't even trust his mates."

"Damn good reason he has," remarked Mac while I studied the blurred, penciled figures.

"Can you get it?" Kennedy queried anxiously.

"Latitude 13—39 South. Long. 167—23—30 E." was all I could decipher on the slip, reading the figures aloud. "Do you know offhand what's there, Mac?"

Mac was wrinkling his brow, scratching his head, thinking hard.

"Let me see," he mused. "Now, that is—" All of a sudden he sat bolt upright. "Why, hell!" He lowered his voice as he added, "Why, that is among the reefs north of Vanua Lava. The most devilish spot in the world. An' the blacks on Vanua—the Solomons are lambs 'longside of that crew. I didn't know there was an atoll in that mess. You see, nobody's bothered with Vanua Lava for years. The natives are so nasty an' there's nothin' worth while anyway. But—" he turned to Tom—"if Van discovered an atoll there, where did he get his divers? I'm sure he could not have persuaded them devils there in Vanua to work for him."

UPON the utterance of the last words we stared at Tom as if he were a ghost. His streaked face had suddenly turned the color of baked mud. His eyes were almost popping from their sockets as he glared at the wall opposite his chair as if some horrible, fantastic picture had suddenly appeared there.

"What's the matter with him all of a sudden?" demanded Kennedy. "Is he due for a fit? Here—" he pushed the bottle toward the man—"pour yourself a drink an' brace up."

"Leave him alone awhile," said Mac. "Something happened there, I bet, that a fellow like him wasn't quite hardened to. Give him a chance to find his nerve."

Tom reached for the bottle like a drowning man for a ring buoy. He gripped it so that the sinews on his bony wrists stood out like cords. Twice in rapid succession he filled and emptied his glass. As the liquor shook his body with convulsions his fist balled slowly.

"Must I think of it again?" he addressed the blank wall, seemingly unaware of our presence. His teeth were clenched. "Yes, you cur! I know how you did it. You hid your rotten *Tinacula* in the lagoon of the atoll. You sneaked to the island coast with your murdering crew in your boats at night. With your boats hidden in the mangroves, you waylaid unsuspecting natives, men, women, or children, one by one. You made them dive for you. If any of them were devoured by sharks, you only laughed, said 'they don't cost anything'. The lagoon was alive with sharks, but every night you went in shore for more victims.

"How you cackled when you told your murderers that your method would make it unhealthy for other ships to try and trade on that shore. And when you had your full cargo, you

played the most beastly trick of all. All but one of the divers you had left you tied together back to back, and before that one man's eyes you threw them to the sharks. How your murderers gloated when you told them that you would let that one man go back to spread the tale of the white man's cruelty among his people, that that would be a sure way of keeping other ships from poaching on your pearl grounds. You fiend!"

With a shudder Tom lapsed into silence. He tried to reach for his glass but his arm dropped limply. He slumped forward in his chair. The nervous strain of living through that terrible experience in his mind had been too much for him.

"My Lord!" gasped Mac. "I'm sure the fellow ain't lyin', but that is the most dastardly thing I've heard of yet."

With a quick move he caught Tom from falling to the floor.

"It's knocked him cold," he barked at me. "Quick, pour him another drink. Here, hand it to me!"

A waiter came to our table.

"Need any help, gents?" He grinned.

"Clear out of this!" snapped Mac.

The waiter strolled away, humming—

> "Because the world has cast you off
> You now must go to sea—"

"He thinks we're shangin' this fellow," said Kennedy. "Good thing; that'll keep their dirty noses off our track."

Mac was an expert at bringing a man to. I think his personality did as much as the liquor he administered. Within three minutes he had Tom sitting upright, weakly blinking his eyes, but quite conscious.

The crowd at the bar had watched the proceeding. Evidently they thought the joke was on us when they saw our prospective victim sit up.

"Hard case, Skipper," one of them dared to venture.

"Shut your dirty flap or I'll do it for you!" Mac thundered, and some one sidled to the door and slunk out.

Tom blinked once more, then shuddered.

"Chills got me, Captain. Fever, you know."

Mac produced a small box from his pocket.

"A little quinine—not too much, though," he advised, dropping a grain or so into a drink of whisky.

Tom swallowed the bitter concoction at a gulp, shook once more.

"Feel better now," he said, bracing himself. He seemed a new man.

"Say, Tom," I went back to the subject in an undertone. "It's a wonder that Van didn't put you out of the way before he made Sydney Head. You could have told enough to have him hanged."

Tom nodded.

"He would have. I suspected that much. But I saved my skin by mentioning the names of some high blokes in the customs service. Made him believe that I knew them well enough to do some greasing for him when it came to bringing the stuff in. Then, when my chance came, I grabbed this shell and swam ashore."

Kennedy nodded emphatically.

"I'll bet Van's been sweatin' blood ever since, knowin' that you are alive, ready to spring the trap under him at any time."

"Let him sweat," snapped Tom, his face hardening. "I am in the game now and I'd rather square with him the way you fellows would. My time will come, but first of all I'd like to have a chance for a raid upon the stock he thought he'd made secure with his dirty work. Oh, he thinks that he can go back there after awhile and catch the natives off their guard again."

FOR awhile Mac sat staring into vacancy, idly drumming the table. He was thinking hard.

"Humph," he grunted, bending forward. "If a fellow knows just what sort

of reception to expect from the blacks, he can find a way of gettin' around them. I don't mean that we would do such dirty work as Van. There're other ways. But do you think that there's any worthwhile shell left in the lagoon? You know the *Tinacula* can take a pretty good load."

"There must be." Kennedy cast the doubt aside. "If there wasn't, why did Van figure on goin' back?"

"That's it!" Tom was ready to support the mate's logic. "I know that the harvest was as good on the last day as on the first. And the sample I've got here is by no means the best there was. I've had many chances of overhearing conversations between Van and his mates. They were always talking about the reefs, how they'd hidden that ground from other traders. But it isn't the shell alone that I have in mind. There was something that I found which Van didn't know about, otherwise he wouldn't have passed it up. Now, listen—"

He looked about to make sure that there were no other ears too close. Then he bent forward and signaled us to move closer.

"Of course," he started in a confidential undertone, "you people can imagine what a hell I was in on board the *Tinacula*. I had to clean shells of rotten meat, just like the slaves. And I was getting sick, ready to take any chance to get away. So, one night, when the boats were on the big island to pick up a few stray natives, I sneaked away in the small gig. Guess I must have been out of my head, for I'd noticed some caves in a high rock bluff and thought of hiding in one of them till Van would be gone. Lord knows what I ever thought of doing after that. Well, anyway, I got into one of the caves. Guess the entrance of it must have been pretty well submerged at high tide. That hole was just alive with about everything that lives on the sea bottom. I was afraid to stay in the small boat, so I started to climb up on a rock shelf inside. In the dark my hand caught something on the rock wall that broke off and, I don't know just why, but I put the thing in my pocket. Then—well, to make a long story short, I soon made up my mind that I could never stay in that cave, so I sneaked back on board before any of the others got wise to my escape. I knew that there would have been no use trying to hide out among the natives."

Mac waited expectantly for a moment, then asked:

"Well, what then? I know that you couldn't stay on Vanua Lava, if that's where you really were. But what's all that got to do with us? What about the thing you put into your pocket, got it yet?"

"Yep, got it right here." Tom nodded triumphantly.

After another furtive glance over his shoulder he reached into his coat pocket and produced a yellowish, crescent shaped object, about four inches in length. At first glance the thing might have been mistaken for a strip of dried up rawhide. Mac immediately covered it with his cupped palm, then blew his breath in a surprised whistle.

"What the devil is it?" demanded Kennedy, decidedly mystified. "Looks like a piece of rind to me."

"I'm glad there's something I can still teach you around the islands, Kennedy," chuckled Mac. "Ever hear of edible birds' nests?"

"Yes, I've heard of 'em, but never knew that they were found in caves nor what they're made of."

"They're found in caves, all right," Mac enlightened him. "They're made by a bird called the salangan, some sort of a swallow, but what those birds make the nests of an' how they make 'em has never been found out. Maybe some of those naturalists know, but I never had a chance to talk with any of them about it. But we don't have to worry about that. All we care about is that there's a good market for 'em. By Jove! If the figures this man gave us are near right

he has discovered a gold mine."

Tom shrugged resignedly.

"Well, Captain," he expostulated, "I don't see what I would gain by leading you on a wild goose chase. I'm so sure of those figures that I'm willing to ship with you, and I'm not fool enough to go to sea with a man whom I've been sending on a fool's errand. Why not go on board and look over your charts and see what there is in that latitude and longitude I gave you?"

CHAPTER III

VANUA LAVA

OMINOUS, black clouds were hovering about the horizon. Now and then, as if wearied of mere threatening, one of the clouds would tear itself from the sullen mass, mount to the zenith and spill itself in a spiteful torrent upon the deck of the lone bark. Like a foe accepting a challenge, a tempestuous squall would then break out of the gloomy calm, shatter the aggressive cloud, disperse the fragments and, with its fury not fully spent, lash itself out on the turbulent sea and in the rigging of the helplessly tossing vessel.

Rain, wind and sea were fighting the battle of supremacy with no regard for the reckless intruder who had dared to venture between the hostile lines in the armageddon of the elements. It was the end of the monsoon. In its last death struggles it whipped and tore at the distant peaks and promontories of the island which occasionally loomed through a rip in the curtain of haze.

It was a most suitable reception for the foolhardy mariners who had dared to approach the unfriendly shore of the island of devils. Devils whose inborn blood lust had only recently been augmented by the cruelties of white devils.

The foolhardy intruder was the bark *Emma P.*

The vessel's crew, rough, unkempt individuals, dressed in the scantiest of dirty, tattered clothing, barefooted, bareheaded, were stationed at various posts about the deck. At sheets, clewlines, downhauls, buntlines. Every effort had to be made to take advantage of the moderating wafts of wind, at the tailend of each furious outburst, by spreading whatever canvas it was safe to set for so short a span of time.

But it was of utmost importance that the vessel be kept under control, that each cantankerous puff of wind be harnessed. The shore, though miles away, was too near to be ignored, too near to leave a vessel drifting about at the mercy of conflicting squalls and tide rips which had never been charted.

Kennedy was on the main deck, watching out that each command from aft was executed without delay. Mac, himself, held the wheel. Tom and I were tending the spanker sheets, ready to give Mac a hand in case the vessel should lay so hard on her rudder that it would take more than one man to turn the spokes.

Came a prolonged lull between squalls.

"You're certainly teaching me something now, Captain," confided Tom while we were resting from our last haul. "I always heard that vessels keep clear of dangerous coasts in this kind of weather. Can you really make an anchorage among the rocks while it is like this?"

"Nobody but a fool would try." Mac laughed. "I know that most men would call me something worse than a fool if they'd see me cruisin' around so close to that shore in this cantankerous weather. But before it gets dark this evening the trade winds will settle down. They're overdue now. However, hard as it may be on all the men, my fool play will save them hardships—yes, probably their lives, later on." Mac's voice had gradually grown serious.

"I'm doin' this for a purpose. I'm playin' devil for the devils on shore. I'm provin' to them that we are stronger devils than the wind an' sea demons. I'm workin' up their superstition."

To say that Tom was puzzled would

be putting it mildly. He stared at me as if he had his doubts as to the captain's sanity.

"Playing devil for the natives on shore!" he echoed aghast. "Why, Captain, that—that—I'm afraid it is a little too deep for me."

"Too deep for you?" Mac scowled from under bushy brows. "My boy, to be successful in this game of dealin' with men who find some weird interpretation for everything that looks unusual to them, you must stretch your imagination to the limit. If you could but see what's goin' on right now in the mangrove thickets along the shore. If you could read the minds of the ape-like creatures who are watchin' every move we make, you most likely would understand."

HE GESTURED shoreward as if he were exhibiting the panorama which lay before his mind's eye. It was almost uncanny to follow him as he pointed out scene after scene as visualized by him. His voice was very grave.

"There they are, lyin' in the bushes, covered with *ty* leaves which they think make them invisible to the eyes of the white man's god. Concealed so that god will not warn his wards that their every move is bein' watched by men who have good cause to hate them. There by their sides lie their bows an' arrows an' their long wooden spears. Ready to be seized the moment the sea an' wind demons answer their chantin' prayers to drive this ship upon the rocks of their shore.

"There, beyond the bluffs, in the shelter of thatch temples, are the devil-doctors, painted with the most hideous decorations in red, yellow an' white, shark teeth an' bone ornaments all over their heads. They are gyratin' an' chantin' around smoky fires, practisin' their abominable sorcery, even offerin' bribes to our god to advise us to seek shelter in some of the coves.

"An' there, hidden in those coves, covered by bushes an' *ty* leaves, are the sharp prowed war canoes. Ready to be manned an' glide into the open the minute we are wrecked.

"Yes, boy, that is Vanua Lava as I can see it with my eyes shut. To the natives of that island the demons are gods. The only way one can reason with them is by investin' them with fear."

"And you mean that to the natives on the island all white men are devils?" probed Tom. "The term surely would apply to Van Asvelt."

"Oh, no," responded Mac. "I am not dependin' on our color, or lack of color if you like that better, to make them regard us as devils. Even to the most primitive savage who has never seen a white man, white men would appear as but plain mortals. If not, we would have nothin' to fear. The reason why I'm showin' off in this kind of weather is to impress upon the simple minds of the savages that the men on board *this particular ship* are devils. The savages think that there's nothin' stronger than the wind an' sea demons. I'm showin' them that we *are* stronger. Maybe after we get in touch with them we'll find more chances of givin' them further demonstration of our power. Let's hope so, anyway."

Tom was deeply impressed.

"But, Captain," he remonstrated, "does that mean that nobody ever traded with Vanua Lava? Of course, I mean before Van Asvelt was there?"

Mac shook his head gloomily.

"Many a ship has left for Vanua an' has never returned," he replied. "Some have made a successful trade in sandalwood an' ebony there. But that was years ago. I made a trip to the west coast of the island myself when I was a youngster, but it was hard tradin'. The woods were the only goods we could get on the island an' that sort of cargo requires a lot of labor 'cause it had to be transported over mountains an' valleys.

"The natives always were too hostile

for such work. The way we did was to trade with rum. By takin' advantage of the feuds among the tribes we used to stake tribe against tribe, makin' a possible enemy an ally an' protector. Salt water tribes against hillmen. But that scheme never worked for long. Before we would have half a cargo we were so badly caught between tribal wars that we had to get out or lose our heads. Durin' the last twenty years everybody's left the island alone."

"Yes, damn Van's hide," Tom added angrily. "That blackguard had to come along and ruin everything."

"It ain't ruined for us," Mac responded confidently. "Not with the scheme I'm workin'. I picked out the monsoon on purpose to convince them devils that we can handle their wind an' sea demons. Now, when we anchor brazenly between your atoll an' the shore, they'll be so scared of us that they won't dare to show themselves."

Tom started suddenly as if stricken by some ill foreboding.

"But, Captain," he remarked, all aflutter with the thought which had struck him. "How do you expect them to work for us if they're afraid to come near us? You know—"

"Don't let that worry you," Mac cut in. "Just stand by for that squall now. The rest we'll worry about when we get to anchor."

CHAPTER IV

FULL MOON

IT LACKED two nights of being full moon. The tide was still rising. Due to the advancing phase of the earth's satellite it was the time for Spring tides. Where during low water the black mouths of caves would have yawned at the bases of rugged, high cliffs, luminous white foam was swirling, seething, gurgling, in a multitude of whirlpools, marking the inrush and ejection of the rolling swell. The waters of the rocky cove were still in a state of agitation from the violent squalls which for many days had whipped them.

A gentle trade wind had set in at sunset. Men stood in the chains, heaving the hand leads, passing the soundings in low voices from mouth to mouth.

Less than a mile to the north of us lay the little atoll with its hidden wealth of magnificent thick pearl shell. A silvery band of breakers marked its sandy beach. Their beckoning call could be heard over our port side during the intermissions between the hooting and whistling of the air expelled from the caves which lay to starboard. Teasing, moon bathed sea elfs at our left, taunting, warning cave ghosts at our right . . . The wildest, most beautiful moonlight scene I have ever beheld.

In the midst of this we came to anchor.

Again I had occasion to admire the genius of the Grand Old Man of the South Seas. Not the cumbersome, heavy bower anchor, with its noisy cable chain rumbled down. Oh, no! Ours was a ghost ship, and ghost ships just glide into the moonlight, then stop wherever they choose without the aid of any contraptions made by man. Like a ghost ship we anchored.

A small but efficient kedge anchor was noiselessly lowered by means of a hemp cable. The cable, running through a snatch block lashed to the bowsprit, was suspended from a whip tackle, slung clear down from the forecrosstrees. It was a simple, but ingenious, scheme.

If perchance our invocation of native superstition should have proven a failure; if, despite the barbed wire tangles on the ship's sides, we should be in danger of being overwhelmed, the foremast crew could run aloft, shake out some of the canvas, then jump on to the fall of the whip tackle and quickly take in enough slack on the cable to break the kedge out as the vessel gathered headway. Thus we would be under sail before the menacing hordes would get over their surprise.

Vessels were sometimes forced to slip

their cables and abandon their anchors. Such procedure, however, was never advisable except as a last resort. At that, a vessel's supply of spare anchors and cables might become exhausted before her trip were half over.

In the pallid light we surveyed the shore. Rugged, wild, awe inspiring it appeared in the still night. In the foreground, for a distance of about half a mile, a gleam of white marked a narrow beach. At the west end of the beach there was the mouth of a river, out of a deep gorge in the high rock wall beyond the beach it came. No life along its banks.

Westward the rock wall sloped upward, then reached far out in a high, steep promontory at the base of which were the mysterious caves. Jagged, black sentinel rocks were guarding their entrances, angry breakers droning among them.

Black thicket stretched eastward from the river's gorge, gradually sloping downward until it encroached upon the beach, then the thicket, too, reached seaward upon a long, low point. In front of the point, amid white breakers, were rocks, rocks, rocks.

Beyond the black forest the mountains reached upward into a purplish blaze.

Tom pointed shoreward.

"Over there, at the east end of the beach, where the mangroves grow out into the water, Van Asvelt was hiding his boats," he said. "Somewhere in the mangroves there must be a path coming from somewhere inland. All the natives that came down to the beach always seemed to come out on the same spot. But none of them, no matter whether they were men, women or children, ever went back while Van's boats were in hiding."

"What the devil did he want with the children?" demanded Bunk. "He didn't use them as divers, did he?"

The recollections which the sight of that sinister shore had awakened made Tom shudder.

"Good Lord, Bunk," he groaned. "Don't make me think or speak of it. Living children will carry tales. But no living creature has ever pronounced an accusation from the jaws of a shark."

To carry on that sort of conversation was being cruel to Tom. I was anxious to change it.

"Tomorrow, when the tide is low," I yawned, "I'm going to look into the caves."

"Better wait a day or two," admonished Kennedy. "No use rushin' at this thing headlong. You might fall into a trap. A day or two will tell whether our scheme of playin' devil worked."

But I was young, and adventure called.

"Rats," I said, pointing at the steep wall of the promontory. "No native ever climbed down that cliff. Besides that, I have my doubts whether they ever go near the foot of the cliff. Such fellows would think that sea caves are haunted."

At that Bunk gestured toward the land end of the promontory.

"Maybe you're right about the blacks believin' that the caves are haunted," he said. "But I think they're not far from the top of that cliff. Strikes me that I see a light shinin' against the tops of the trees back of it."

"Yeah, you see a light, all right," scoffed Cockney. "If you look above you you'll see the moon too. Bunk, go an' get a drink fer yerself. What you see is the moon shinin' on them trees. That's what."

Bunk was not to have his eyesight maligned without some reprisal.

"Moonshine! You— Say, did you ever see moonshine flicker? There's some kind of unsteady glow on them trees. Maybe it's that red head of yourn that you can't hold steady for a second."

Debating the matter, some of us pro-Bunk, others pro-Cockney, we kept our eyes fixed upon the trees beyond the promontory.

One, two minutes passed thus. Then:

"There now, you walkin' port-side-light," emitted Bunk. "See that glow gettin' brighter? See— Hell! Look at that! Moon, huh!"

Now there was no further question, and there was something to stare at.

WITH the suddenness of the glow one can observe shooting up above the roofs of a distant gas works the whole sky became ablaze. The treetops beyond the promontory were now in such a bright light that from our three-quarter mile distance we could discern branches and leaves. But no flames were visible.

"I'll be damned!" came from Mac.

Not a sound came with the phenomenon. And we just stood and gaped like wooden soldiers.

Hoooot! It was the sound of expelled air from some cave. And within the next few seconds, as if some joker tried to make us doubt what we had seen, the glare was snatched from the sky, from the trees. The sky again was dark, the trees only dimly illuminated.

For all the theory an observer could advance for the sudden appearance and disappearance of the glow, its source might have been uncovered and screened again by a blanket.

"A signal, and no doubt about it," opined Kennedy. "But how did they do it, and what's it for?"

Nobody else said a word. Not a man on board that ship had an answer for Kennedy's question. We all watched in silence as if we knew the phenomenon would appear again.

And truly, within a few minutes, there it was again. Flared up as before, then, suddenly, was snatched away.

Many minutes we watched now, and many times we saw the glare followed by darkness until we could time the light and dark periods to precision. But, whatever the signals could have meant, nothing that would molest us had happened.

"As regular as clockwork," pronounced Bunk at last. "A fellow'd think them niggers got some kind of a machine with which they do the stunt."

Mac seemed to be absorbed in a brown study. Some of the men turned away, gathered some distance apart from the rest and conversed in an undertone.

" 'Taint't no safe place to hook in fer the night," one of them voiced the thoughts of all, loud enough to be heard on the quarterdeck. "I don't like the looks of it."

"Me neither," came another grumbling voice.

" What's the matter wid youse blokes?" demanded Cockney. "Anybody'd think th' blacks comin' after youse fer long pig."

That stopped the grumbling for awhile.

"Tom," said Mac, coming out of his reverie. "Did you see anything like that when you were here before?"

"Nothing like this, Captain," Tom replied. "On two or three nights I've seen the glow of a fire which looked to be some distance back in the bush, but then it was just a steady glow, like any other fire, and not much at that. This —I never saw anything like it."

Once more Mac surrendered to deep thought. Suddenly, as if some idea was dawning, he burst forth:

"When were you here, Tom? I mean what phase of the moon? Now try to think. You weren't here around full moon, were you?"

Tom was a little mystified, and so, I will wager, were most of us; but after careful thought he replied—

"Well, now, come to think of it, Captain, I'm pretty sure the moon was two or three days on the decline when we anchored, and it was not quite full when we left."

"Hmn. You sure of that?"

"Well, I wouldn't stake my soul on it, sir, but I'm reasonably certain. You know it did not take long to load up. The lagoon was lousy with shell, and that blackguard collected quite an army

of divers. He made them work from sunrise till dark."

"No doubt about that," assented Mac, slapping the rail with his palm. "Well, now, I think I can give you fellows an idea of what the row is about.

"You know I've told you that I was over on the west coast of the island some years ago. Well, I remember that just about full moon the blacks there were in a hell of a stew. We didn't know what it was all about, but the laborers we had hired for loggin' disappeared like the earth had swallowed them. All in hidin' somewhere; then, a few days after full moon, they all popped up again. When we tried to find out what had happened they pointed at the moon an' rolled their eyes like that many frightened rabbits.

"Well, sir, it so happened that we were there over two fulls, an' damned if the same thing didn't happen again the second time the moon was full. By that time we were able to converse with them fellows in a few broken words, an' so we got a little something out of 'em, although we could not get much detail.

"It seems that these tribes here on the north coast got some devilish ritual which we might call the fête of the full moon, or something like that. When that's about due, they make raids on the other tribes an', if you could believe what I was told, the prisoners they take they fry alive!

"Yes, sir, as near as those scared niggers could describe the thing, there was something like this goin' on. Some kind of a fire that would go up an' down, but how it was done the Lord only knows."

Kennedy turned his gaze from Mac to Tom.

"Nice gentle playmates you're introducin' us to," he said in mock reproach. "I think we'll stand a four-man anchor watch till the moon quarters."

Mac waved all apprehension aside.

"We don't have to worry. Our scheme of playin' devil worked, otherwise they would have given us a call by now."

CHAPTER V

ADVENTURE CALLS

TWO drowsy men, those who had stood the last anchor watch, kept themselves awake by voluntarily turning to at the task of the morning's wetting down when I appeared on deck a few minutes after dawn. Tired from the recent ordeal of fighting squalls, all those who had the chance made the best of the opportunity to prolong their hours of rest.

Ominous as the phenomenon of the night might have appeared to the majority of the crew, Mac's simple explanation had put all minds at ease. Why should men deprive themselves of their sleep while there is a watch on deck which thinks as much of its own skin, or more, as of that of the sleepers? Mac's order had been to let each man chose his own rising hour unless there be signs of danger. There had been no alarm, and now the ship slept.

I stood at the rail near the galley, drinking in the scene which lay before me. In all the years I had cruised among the islands never had I seen anything so untouched by civilization's devastating hand. Portentous the shore had looked at night. Now, with the mountains gilded by the first rays of the morning sun, it looked alluring.

There, to the west, at the base of the high cliff, were the yawning, black mouths. Wide open now, for the tide had been rising for not more than half an hour. It would be more than five hours before they would be hooting their warning "look out!"—before they would be frothing angrily, spitting foam.

There was no one about to restrain me. Should I?

Five, six minutes passed. The morning was calm and peace seemed to hover over the island. There was not a sign of what the night had revealed. The stillness was broken only by the swishing of the water the watchmen were pouring on the deck.

Now the top of the cliff was gilded. Rapidly the rays were gliding down the steep, gray side.

"Only a fly could climb or descend that wall unaided," thought I. "Where could the danger lie?"

Sunlight fell into the caverns. And then, as if nature must greet the new born day with rejoicing, the whole interior of the promontory seemed to resound with the song of the sirens.

Teasing, enticing came the strains, louder, louder. Then like the mouths of furnaces vomiting clouds of black smoke, each cave gave up swarms, millions of birds. Out they poured, soaring low, casting a shadow upon the water, the sun's rays reflecting from their backs and wings as if they were a mass of hurled chips of blue steel. Over the mangrove bushes they were gliding, following along the water's edge; without alighting, clear over the eastern point of the cove. There they turned about, retraced their course and soon were swallowed by the mysterious black mouths.

I glanced aft. The small gig hung suspended from its tackle. There was no one to restrain me.

"Ten, maybe fifteen minute, I make breakfas' for you," came a voice close behind me.

It was the Spanish cook's broken English which had startled me. He must have taken my lounging at the rail so near to the galley as a hint. I had not given food a thought. The cook came to my side.

"What you tink of dis place? You tink it look good?"

I nodded. The swarms of birds were reappearing. The morning chore of hunting and feeding the young had evidently begun. They went over the same route again.

"If these are the birds that make those valuable nests," I replied to the cook's query, "we ought to make a pretty rich haul. Why, man, there are millions of them."

"Zey are ze bird," the cook assured me. "Many time I cook plenty of zose nest. I cook zem in ze zoop."

"Oh, you did? Maybe you know what they make their nests of, then."

The cook, like many others when confronted with that same question, shrugged his shoulders.

"Zat is someting nobody know. Ze bird he keep ze secret. He make his nest in no other place zan ze water cave. He make it when ze tide is high so nobody can go in ze cave."

That was the most information on the subject I had been able to obtain. To delve into the unknown was like an obsession with me. It certainly did not dampen my adventurous spirit.

"COOK," I said with a sudden resolution, "you just scrape together whatever is handy in the galley and I'll eat right here on deck. Before the tide is too high, I'm going to slip into that big cave there—" I pointed out the largest, highest of the mouths—"and stay there till I find out what's going on."

The two watchmen had dropped their buckets and were now beside us. They had overheard my last words.

"You'd better not," one of them cautioned, shaking his head doubtfully. "You don't know how much headroom there's in that hole when the water's high. You might get swamped. Then what?"

"Oh, hell," I remonstrated. "There must be plenty of headroom. If there wasn't, how could such a big swarm of birds build their nests? They sure don't hatch their young under water."

The man seemed only half convinced as to the wisdom of my proposed undertaking.

"I be damned if I'd do it if I was you. Supposin' there is lots of headroom, but who knows what's below?" He tried another form of dissuasion. "If I was you I'd wait till the skipper gets on deck. He might give us watchmen hell for lettin' a boat leave the ship. An' then, who knows about the niggers?"

"Avast with that!" I exploded impatiently. "As far as the boat is concerned, I guess the second mate can go over the heads of the watchmen. By the time the skipper gets up the tide'll be too high. As for the blacks, I don't think they'd go near those caves." With firm conviction I added, "I'll bet they believe that all sorts of spooks live in them caves."

The other man, who had meanwhile been silently gazing at the open caverns, now meaningly pointed in that direction with the stem of his pipe.

"Yeah, y' think so?" he drawled, squinting hard. "Well, tell me then, just what d' you make out o' that? What's them things stickin' up there look like to you?"

The four of us now looked steadily whither the man was directing our gaze.

"Yeah, guess you see it too, now, eh? Them two black things stickin' out of the water."

And truly, the man was right. There was something suspicious about the appearance of what he had pointed out. The sight of it certainly set my brain to work. Some peculiar rock formation? Very improbable. Nature can hardly be expected to execute such peculiarities in such precise duplicate.

Two thick, pole-like objects were projecting above the churned foam probably a hundred feet from the cave. They seemed to be set into something solid below the surface, for they did not sway or shift with the current which swirled by them at least at a two-knot rate. No mistake about their color. It was jet black, and all the rocks near the shore were covered with green growth. Seen through the glass, these poles had a rather peculiar, carved appearance. Both of them were exactly of the same height, about five or six feet above the water's surface. Their tops were rounded and smooth, as if fashioned by careful hands. At high tide they surely were submerged.

I refused to persuade myself that those caves should have been violated by human hands. But if nature should have placed these objects there, what under the sun could it be, which for ages would reject barnacles and other marine growth?

Ah, I had it. The fiber of the trunk of the cocoa nut palm will shed almost everything. Before some volcanic upheaval had changed the landscape, palms had grown there. These were the remnants of two trunks.

"You're off your course," I told the man, laughing. "Those things are nothing but the stumps of two dead trees."

The seaman shot me a disgusted look.

"Trees me eye!" He spat. "Betcha there's three fathoms of water there. How'd trees come to grow up from the bottom on all them rocks? No, sir, them there things is a couple o' them damn totem poles that the natives has planted there. Lay off from that hole, Mister; alone, anyway. Lay off, I advises."

Even on a freelance trader, where seamen are not mere hirelings, a mate must maintan a certain dignity in keeping with his rank. Though I was half inclined to share the man's theory, I was a little too strong headed to give him the satisfaction of being able to say that he had advised me. My mind was made up. The cook must have read it, for he rushed into the galley to prepare a hasty meal.

"All right, then," I snapped, without arguing the question further. "It'll be very important for us to know just what to expect if we want to get anything out of those caves. I don't know of any better morning's work than to get the lay of the land. Now you two just launch the gig. I'll take all the responsibility, and it's my own skin I'm risking."

A BEAUTIFUL, clear morning; barely a breath of wind; a gently heaving swell; a favorable current; a light thirteen-foot gig and the lure of the unknown ahead; could this world offer

treasure more acceptable to the heart of an adventurer? I enjoyed every stroke of that row.

Straight for one of the objects which had been under discussion I headed. With occasional glances over my shoulder I watched the thing draw nearer. No stump of a coconut palm that, I had to admit. It was a round pole, sure enough. Its surface was covered with a lot of uneven furrows, some running crosswise, some up and down, forming a multitude of irregular squares like—why, like a burned timber!

A few more strokes of the oars. The boat's gunwale scraped against the pole. It was but a light touch, but even so, a good handful of powdery, black lumps came down upon the thwart beside me. Crumbled, charred wood, and no mistake about it. The other pole, but a few feet away, was the same. When I gazed down into the clear water below, the discovery I made gave me a rather queer sensation.

Not many feet below the keel of my boat was the fire blackened deck of a schooner! The two poles, which must have reached up to the level of high water, were the charred remnants of her masts.

Totem poles, indeed! Here was something which gave, by far, more food for thought than any fetish which pagan worshipers could have planted.

Surely the stumps of masts had not been there very long. There was not a sign of sea slime in the many checks of the charred wood. At the most, only a month could have passed since the vessel had gone down. And the water was so clear that it was easily determined that she had been ablaze from stem to stern before she sank.

Had some unfortunate crew already paid the penalty for Van Asvelt's diabolical machinations? Who could the unfortunates have been?

All my probing and fishing with my ten-foot pike pole about the deck, the cabin top, the hatches, revealed nothing which might have established the schooner's identity.

What now? Pull back to the ship and report my discovery? Quite a hard question to decide.

The tide had gained fully six inches during the time I spent on my fruitless search over the schooner's deck. Within two hours the interior of the cave would be inaccessible. What would Mac say upon receiving my report? Very likely it would be "hands off those caves". And then—well, then I might never get the chance of viewing nature's hidden wonders. Even though he should let me go on my way again, I might miss the opportune tide, and other days only heaven knew what they might bring forth.

And then the gibes on the part of my shipmates!

"Gee, that second mate o' ourn sure knows how ter take care o' his hide!" "Got scared 'cause he found a' ol' burned hulk!" "Say, wouldn't he look handsome in a uniform on a gun lugger or some rich dude's yacht? . . ."

No, I'd rather take the chance of rowing into a trap inside of that black hole right there than take a chance of running a gantlet of malignantly grinning faces for months to follow. No sense in hurrying the report. Nothing could be done for the schooner's unfortunate crew.

Then, out of the caves, fluttered the swarms of birds. Their chirps came like a welcome to their homes. My mind was made up.

Drawn by an irresistible force I covered the short distance with resolute strokes. I saw a black arch over my head. Daylight changed to twilight, twilight to an indigo darkness.

Enraptured, I rested my oars. The force which had drawn me, now held me like a magnet. At the moment, nothing ominous enough could have lunged at me from above or below to make me turn back.

What a vision! A floor of azure crystal. Walls jutted with myriads of opalescent, glimmering projections. Some

twenty feet above the liquid floor, an arched ceiling, moss covered so that it was a deep sea green. And far back, opposite the mouth which now was slowly closing, at the end of a narrowing inky channel which penetrated deeper and deeper into midnight, was a sinister black throat which might have led to the bowels of the earth.

Beautiful, yet awe inspiring was that cave. In the depth below the transparent floor things writhed and crawled. Ill shapen creatures, such as seldom seek the open, sun bathed waters, dashed toward each other, met in combat, or, at the critical moment, dodged and fled.

A monstrous sting-ray came gliding from under some submerged rocky shelf. Its ugly eyes glared upward at my boat. Its whip-like tail, tipped with a sharp, hooked point, was ready to strike. But, evidently deciding that its prospective victim was too safely guarded, it darted back into its favorite haunt, there again to lie in ambush. A slinking criminal, foiled on his mission of violence. Far below, from a hollow in the almost perpendicular wall, the head of a moray, the voracious giant eel of tropical waters, thrust itself. So vicious the creature was that it snapped its jaws, lined with razor edged teeth, at my shadow before its slimy head disappeared.

But what a different scene there was above that floor which formed a sharp division between the horrible and the sublime. Above, only peace and happiness reigned if ever it reigned on earth.

All about the walls, beginning at a line well above the reach of the highest tides, extending upward to where the walls melted into the ceiling, were thousands upon thousands of little crescents. Many were of a light amber hue. Those were vacant. But from others, those which glistened like polished ivory, tiny feathered heads were peeping. The whole cave was ringing with their chirps as if the musical notes were intended to distract me from the silent horrors below. From above, only friendly, bright little eyes were inquiringly blinking.

How much like a great city, that cave. Cheer and good will on the surface, striving to hide viciousness and iniquity under cover.

I WAS oblivious to the rising of the water. Time and time again the swarm of feathered inhabitants whirred past my ears. My presence did not seem to disturb them in the least.

Out they flew, shutting off all but the light which percolated through the water. For awhile the air, churned by thousands of slender, steel-blue wings, fanned my hair like a whirlwind. Then a long pause. Then, with joyous chirping and bulging crops, the swarm returned.

Many times they went and returned. Only when the birds were compelled to fly so low that the backdraft from their wings stirred the smooth surface into ripples did I realize that no boat could have passed under the arch of the entrance. I was trapped!

Inch by inch the cave's mouth was closing. Higher and higher I floated. It gave me a feeling of being in a chamber, the ceiling of which was slowly descending, like some horrible contraption of torture, devised in the Middle Ages, to make the agony of drowning doubly cruel.

Deeper and deeper grew the twilight while the light down below seemed to grow brighter. Now, with every rolling swell, the water was lapping the top of the cave's mouth. With every upheave the massive rock walls reverberated with a dull boom. I was in a world upside down, where the light came from below instead of a blue sky. The only man in a world inhabited by fairies and ogres.

But it was not a dark world. The light, filtering through the clear water, illuminated the walls and ceiling like a landscape in a clear moonlight night.

Now a transformation had taken place. With the ultimate closing of the

gap between water and rock the life around and above me seemed to have ceased. But below the gruesome denizens, the criminals who shun daylight, began their activities.

Since my vision was no longer disturbed by sun rays, every object in the depth stood out as clear as if I were floating on air.

And what I saw!

Here and there, like ugly, leafless grayish weeds sprouting from a hillside, clusters of tentacles stealthily crept forth from submerged crevices. They were waving to and fro, coiling around themselves and uncoiling, as if they were testing their crushing strength on imaginary victims, probing the water farther from the rock, spreading out fan shape, like opening petals, growing longer and longer. Some grew to a length of eight or ten feet. Then, at last, ugly, bulbous heads with greedily staring eyes appeared at the base of each cluster.

Octopi! Monstrous in size and enough of them to make one's blood turn to water.

Since, from without, the cave must now have appeared like a vacant, black hole, schools of fish, being pursued by enemies in the open, ran into the trap for shelter. Nature had given the possessors of the tentacles the intelligence to foresee this. Like giant spiders who had spread their webs to ensnare their prey, they were now ready for the kill. Many a hapless rock cod I saw caught by the tentacles and sucked into the insatiable stomachs.

One of the great clusters was not more than eight feet below my boat. Hopefully I watched for a battle to the finish when I saw a large sting-ray glide within easy reach. But instead of trying to seize the equally formidable monster, the octopus drew its head back into its lair, curled its arms close to the rock to give the big, flat fish all the room it needed to pass. Nature had bestowed the spidery creature with sufficient instinct to realize the danger which lay in the fringe of barbed spines which rimmed the edge of the sting-ray's flat body. Let those spines but penetrate the skin and they will gradually work inward until they pierce some vital organ. The digestive juices of the octopus's stomach could not dissolve the horny substance of the spines before the tissue would be pierced.

The ray, too, seemed to know the crushing power of the snake-like arms and the horny, black teeth, shaped like the bill of a parrot, which the arms encircled. Its tail made no attempt to strike. The two monsters appeared to regard each other with an air of armed neutrality.

My ten-foot pike hook lay handily before me. Like the adventurous fool I was, I poised its sharp point downward. Then, at the moment not realizing the danger of the rash act—a stupid practical joke to play on a creature which will stand for no trifling—I drove the iron point into the root of one of the arms.

Too late then to indulge in self-reproach!

With concerted, vicious lashes the eight arms struck outward, naturally at the nearest living thing, the ray. The none too indulgent fish took the sudden move for a breach in the age old neutrality. Its long tail whipped. The dagger point struck. The battle was on.

Little did I see of it after the beginning. I caught a fleeting glimpse of hundreds of smaller fish scurrying for safety in the greater depth and the entrance. Then there was no more to be seen. A thick stream of inky liquid was ejected from the octupus's mouth. Within a fraction of a second the combatants were enveloped in a liquid cloud. A few seconds more and I found myself engulfed in blackest midnight.

I had enough of that sort of sport. The commotion of the water warned me that neither side had declared an armistice. It would have been mere play for one of the giant arms to reach up and upset the small boat.

To give the scene of battle as wide a

berth as possible, I took to the oars and rowed madly toward the throat of the cave. It could not be any darker there than it was now near the entrance.

Half a dozen strokes—possibly the most powerful strokes I ever rowed. I felt the boat's keel grate upon a rock shelf—shallow water. The boat came to a sudden stop. The light shirt and trousers, the only clothes I wore, felt like rough canvas rubbing on a million pinpoints sticking in my skin!

CHAPTER VI

THE GATE OF HELL

THE striking of the oar blades against solid rock on both sides, and the touch of the keel upon solid bottom, was evidence that I had gone as far as the boat would take me. But a few yards farther ahead the gate, which led to God knew where, must be. The utter blackness, the proximity of the clammy walls and ceiling at that end made me feel creepy enough. But what had made the goose flesh break out all over my skin, was a sound so weird that it would have made a mummy shiver.

Had all the fiends of Hades concerted in chorus to turn the blood of one poor mortal to water?

Hoooo—wooooo! it came, half moan, half howl.

And with the sound, like the damp, cold breath of the giant ogre that had both howled and moaned, came a blast of air which almost blew me off the small boat's thwart. My clothes fluttered in the strong gust—as strong as any typhoon I had ever felt. The loose garments slapped against my prickly skin so that it smarted.

And then, as suddenly as the gust had come, came dead calm and silence.

I had expected that at some phase of my exploration of the cave I might find myself in darkness—not such darkness as this, however—so had come prepared for such emergency. In one of my pockets was a candle and some matches. I struck a light, for a view of one's surroundings tends to lessen the helpless feeling intensified by darkness.

But the small flame never reached the wick of the candle. Only for an instant did I see my shadow dance on the black wall when the flame was snuffed out by a second blast of air. This time it came from the opposite direction as if I had passed through the calm center of a cyclone. It blew past me as strong as before.

Woooo—hoooo! again came the moan and howl.

Once more came calm and stillness.

That was too much. My nerves gave way. I snatched up the boat hook and madly thrashed and stabbed about me. Each sidewise, upward or downward swing made the heavy point clatter against solid rock. At forward and backward jabs I drove into nothing but empty, dark space. Striking downward at the boat's stern, I struck deep water, but the same blows at the bow end did not raise a splash. The iron always rebounded from hard, dry ground. As far as I could reach, there appeared to be no abyss.

The blasts and counter blasts, always accompanied by the weird howl and moan, came as regularly as if timed by clockwork. My nerves began to steady themselves, and I noticed that the blasts came in tempo with the heave and thump of the boat's keel upon the bottom. The water within the cave was rising and falling with the ocean swell.

With a calmer mind I began to analyze the strange phenomenon. The rise and fall of the surface within the chamber was acting like an immense piston. Air was being drawn in and expelled through the very passage at the mouth of which my boat lay. Evidently the walls and ceiling of that passage, being formed by nature, were rough with crevices and projections. Such irregularities in an air duct would naturally produce some sort of sound. The duct probably being large, and the volume of the churned air amounting to thousands

of cubic feet, the sound produced could be expected to be weird.

Not once had my boat hook impinged against anything which would suggest lurking danger. My courage returned. The urge of the explorer now came to the front. Surely, with air passing through that passage, there must be an outlet somewhere.

I put one foot over the bow. An accumulation of slimy weeds, about a foot deep, then solid bottom. I stepped out, felt farther ahead with the pole. Space straight ahead, rock at the sides, at the top, at the bottom.

Then, as I bent over to reach out as far as possible, something struck me from behind!

It was a hard, severe boost which I received. At first it set my hair to tingling again. But I collected my wits quickly enough to remember that the boat, being relieved of my weight, had been driven forward by the heave of the swell. Its stem had struck me, and calmly I pulled it up to prevent its drifting away.

WATER was dripping down upon me, but I did not care. I became reckless. Here lay a chance for adventure which should not be passed up.

Carefully testing the rock floor in front of me with the iron point, I advanced. Now and then I encountered a crevice, filled with mud, into which I sank almost knee deep. But these crevices were not more than a foot wide. Always on the other side there was hard rock.

Twenty, thirty yards of this. The tunnel became low. I had to stoop. At times, beneath some hanging rock, I had to crawl on hands and knees. Then again there were places where the boat hook could be upended.

Where would this end?

It was impossible to judge the distance. The pitch darkness and the terrific air blasts, coming now from in front then from behind me, kept me in such a state of confusion.

Easily two hundred, possibly three hundred yards, and the mad scramble came to an end. With a sharp click the iron point of the forward thrust boat hook fetched up against something solid.

Carefully, inch by inch, I felt my way along the pole. My hand slipped from the wood on to the iron tip, then against an almost vertical rock wall ahead. But this could not be the end, for the air current was still surging past me. It seemed to come from, and go to, some point above.

I groped about. Sure enough, the rock wall ahead was merely the front of a shelf which was not more than three feet above the floor upon which I crouched. Above the shelf the passage continued, but from there on it sloped upward at a steep angle. And when I peered through it seemed to me that I saw dim light coming from above a long distance away.

Now nothing could have stopped me. I crawled into the opening, which smelled like a chimney flue. The pole was too long to be taken past the sharp upward turn. I left it where it lay. On hands and knees I crawled, sometimes I had to slide forward on my stomach. It was filthy in there. The sides, the top, the bottom were covered with a sticky, tarry substance. Each strong gust coming from above brought with it an odor of must and soot. There was little danger of encountering anything living, nevertheless I drew my sheath knife. The feel of a weapon in my hand in such a dingy hole was comforting.

Here, too, were crevices in the rock, but they were not filled with mud. The sticky, ill smelling substance which lined the flue—a flue it was, beyond doubt—was filling every hollow. At times I slipped about like a greased eel.

Onward and upward, possibly forty or fifty yards. Darkness changed to twilight. There were slight bends, places where the flue spread wide and shallow, other places where it was quite narrow and deep. I knew that I was on the

trail of some mystery. The knowledge spurred me on.

Now there was enough light so I needed no longer to depend upon my sense of touch. And then I came to the end of that infernal flue. It was the end of nature's work.

I had arrived at the point where man's work began!

Before me was another rock shelf about four feet above the sloping bottom. But it could easily be seen that this shelf was built of carefully placed tiers of rough stones; around it was a pit lined with similar stones. The pit was nearly round, some three feet in diameter. Here I was able to stand upright.

But the light did not come from a blue sky above, nor did it come filtering through green foliage. It came from under something which obstructed my upward glance.

Very cautiously I climbed upon the shelf. Everything was covered with the sticky, slimy ooze. The stones which lined the pit were fairly cemented together with it.

But in the filth which covered the flat stone upon which I crouched there were footprints!

WORDS could not have spoken plainer than these prints. They were distorted, twisted. Those who had stood here had writhed in agony.

But that was not all that made my scalp creep and tingle anew. There were objects lying about. Black, sinister appearing objects: they were charred human bones. I was on the trail of a mystery!

Shuddering, I listened. Not a sound. Only that weird hooting from below. Would delving further into the secret of some savage ritual—such as undoubtedly had taken place here—be worth the risk of being discovered?

I was reckless. I had gone that far. Now I must find out what this meant.

Carefully, lest the presence of a living being should be detected before it would be too late to withdraw, I raised one of the charred bones—a man's thigh bone it seemed to be—above the level of the ground. I waited with palpitating heart.

Nothing stirred above me. I waved the repulsive decoy about, then, growing bolder, reached with it over the edge of the pit and dragged it all around over the rim. Now something stirred. The strong draft, being drawn in by the suction from below, brought a shower of charred wood and ashes upon my head and shoulders. The stuff clung to the sticky slime with which I was covered from head to foot. I must have been a sight such as would have frightened any savage.

Now I thought of the peculiar fire we had seen on the height the night before. I certainly must have ascended to the level where it was displayed. Was it possible that I had stumbled upon the source of the strange phenomenon? If so, why should there be danger in broad daylight?

Before I gave my better judgment time to reconsider the rash move, I was in a standing posture.

What a sight! Had I been more timid than inquisitive I would have withdrawn right then and hastened back to the boat. But there was no danger, for apparently I was alone. But my surroundings!

My head and shoulders protruded through a round hole, just large enough for a man to pass through. The hole was in a platform built of thick, flat stone slabs. All blackened from smoky fires. The platform was raised above the leveled, stone paved ground to a height of about a foot and a half. It was supported by numerous stone pillars. Some of the spaces between the pillars were almost choked with charred wood, coconut husks and ashes.

The platform itself was roughly circular, possibly thirteen or fourteen feet in diameter. As I stood upon the shelf below, the platform's upper surface was

but slightly above my elbows. Even a fairly short man would have had his shoulders slightly above the upper level.

The hole was practically in the center. A manhole it might be termed. Close beside it on the platform lay a thin stone slab which might have served as a cover. Whether this opening was intended for access to the pit below, heaven only knew. I was yet to find that out.

About twenty feet above my head was a thatch roof shaped like an enormous, inverted bowl. Seen in plan it was octagonal in outline. No walls supported its eaves which dropped within ten feet from the ground. Eight thick posts, too blackened to tell whether they were of bamboo or wood, formed the sole support for the roof.

It was quite plain why there were no enclosing walls to support the roof. With the space below the platform a roaring furnace, with the blast coming up from the shaft fanning the flames, no others but walls of fireproof material would have resisted the heat. Thatch or wood would have burst into flame. A wonder the roof could withstand it. Its under side, too, was blackened from smoke. Possibly the poor devils, who were to meet their fate on the hearth, were compelled to reconstruct the roof if fire had destroyed it during some previous ritual.

A hearth it was, that stone platform. There was enough evidence below it to remove all doubt. But for what purpose was the hearth used?

AS I STOOD there, looking about me, I did not have to overstrain my imagination to arrive at the truth. I had come upon a sacrificial altar within a pagan temple!

Closely spaced around the rim of the hearth were objects, the sight of which sent more chills down my spine. There were two concentric circles of shriveled, baked human heads.

As near as, under the spell of the horror, I could keep my mind on cold figures, I counted seventy of these ghastly trophies.

I thought of what Mac had said about the fête of the full moon. Could this be the temple where those terrifying rituals, of which other tribes thought with such awe, were held? What else could it be, unless there were more than one?

Not likely. For nature's hand had made the existence of this hell possible. With what diabolic ingenuity those island fiends had harnessed a freak of nature! The whole phenomenon of the flashing fires explained itself. As I stood upon the stone at the head of the mysterious tunnel, with my chest and shoulders filling the manhole in the hearth, I felt the strong draft surge to and fro around the lower part of my body. About two minutes it blew outward, then two minutes inward. Quite plain that, with the flat stone covering the hole, with fires kindled below the platform, the thing which had baffled us the night before could easily have been effected.

But—does the stone cover the manhole during the ritual of the fête?

Preposterous to think that, possibly centuries ago, those primitive savages who had built this hearth had harnessed a force of nature, the utilization of which has, among civilized men, remained but an inventor's dream. And equally preposterous that the force of nature should be used for the perpetration of such ghastly work as was plain before my eyes. That those who employed it had not the remotest idea of the source of the power they employed.

Their superstitious ignorance would never permit them to descend the ghostly tunnel to the cave. Beyond doubt some priests of a remote past had ascribed the air current, with its weird hooting, to some supernatural power. Possibly to the angry bellows of some monster whose wrath must be appeased. But why did they conjoin the phenomenon with the full moon?

Right then, while virtually a part of

that ghastly contraption, I conceived the answer.

But I did not linger long to reflect upon the phases of the earth's satellite, how they affect the tides. The sudden thought of what would happen if some of the devil-devil doctors should appear to prepare for the ritual that night drove thoughts of cold science away. With one more glance about me I swept the grounds about the temple.

It was a desolate place. A large, bowl shaped hollow beyond the sloping sides of which I saw the blue sky. On only one side were the tops of trees visible. The tops of the trees we had seen so brightly illuminated when viewing them from the deck of the ship. The surface within the hollow had nothing else to offer but bare ground and stones.

I had seen enough. Back into the tunnel I slipped, crawling and sliding backward until I reached the stone ledge against which my boat hook rested.

After looking into that hell above, the dark tunnel seemed like a safe haven of refuge. I began to loiter. Became curious about the length of the subterranean passage. There was the ten-foot pole. Near enough for a rule.

I set to work, repeatedly pushing the pole ahead its full length while keeping my knee where I had found its end after each shift ahead. Ninety-two times I went through the measuring operation before I reached the boat. Over three hundred yards long was that natural tunnel. To this had to be added the distance which the sloping flue advanced horizontally while graduating up to the level of the high ground above. I judged this horizontal dimension to be forty yards. A conservative figure at that.

The tide had already receded a foot or so, for I had to drag the boat over the slippery bottom much farther than it had been pulled up. Lucky for me that the water had not risen sufficiently high to jam the boat into the constriction of the tunnel which was but five or six feet ahead of the bow.

The cave was as still as a tomb. The battle below the surface was over. The water had cleared again. Once more the whole interior of the cave was bathed in the silvery sheen which equaled moonlight. Whichever of the combatants had won the battle, there was no sign of either victor or vanquished. And I took good care not to indulge in any more practical jokes on such monsters.

Now I took interest in the enormity of the cavern. Its flooded part, measured from the submerged entrance to the water's edge at the black throat, must have been easily one hundred and fifty feet long; at its widest it must have measured fifty feet. No wonder that a gentle rise and fall of the liquid floor should cause such an enormous out and inrush of air through the small passage. No wonder that the ages had never filled the crevice in the rock with mud.

From the darker channel, from which I was sculling the boat, I viewed the arched entrance. Its top was now about two feet below the gently heaving crystal floor. It looked like a glimmering, submerged aurora borealis in which thousands of fish were playing, reflecting the light from outside in colors of a living rainbow. Peace had settled upon one of the most beautiful of nature's wonders.

But the birds? Not a sound from them. Had they gone to rest, mistaking the calmness for night?

The air in the cave was pure, savory with that salty tang which makes the sea air so invigorating. I was thankful to be able to fill my lungs with it after having inhaled the stench above. The tunnel was too long to allow the fumes to be drawn down to more than half its length before they would be blown back to the fires whence they came. The greasy, tarry deposit I had encountered in the upper part of the passage attested to that.

I LOOKED at the numerous crescents about the walls. Thousands of them, perhaps abandoned, hung there without a sign of life in them. From thousands of others little heads were peeping as before. But there were yet thousands of others which suddenly held my interest.

Above each one of *these* thousands a little tuft of feathers hung as if glued to the rock. These tufts of feathers were live birds, their tiny bodies slowly swinging to and fro in rhythmic motion. They hung there with their heads down, industriously working.

I was thrilled. I had discovered nests in the course of construction, the thing which had drawn me into the cave. Some of the crescents were but mere curved lines upon the face of the wall. Others were of various widths, some half an inch, at their widest, which was midway between the extreme points. Some were already an inch wide at the center of the arc and stood out in relief to the extent of three-quarters of an inch. The completed nest was shaped very much like a quarter section of an orange peel held cupped against some flat, vertical surface. It measured about five inches from point to point.

The little workers were so absorbed by their important tasks that they did not mind my coming close. Alongside of the growing nest hung the worker's mate, calmly watching the slow progress. Now and then, at regular intervals, the pair would change places. The one who had rested would work with its head down, swinging like a pendulum. The previous worker would watch the construction.

The thing fascinated me. Here was my chance to delve into the secret which had remained a mystery to those who regarded these nests as an epicurean delicacy. Cautiously I climbed upon a ledge and crawled close to one of the industrious pairs.

"Chip!" came from the little fellow who was enjoying his resting spell, regarding me with inquisitive eyes.

The worker—whether male or female, I could not tell; both appeared to look alike in the peculiar light—never slackened its rhythmic swaying. An eavesdropper, as long as he did not interfere, did not seem to worry the little creatures. A pet canary could not have been tamer. With my cheek flattened against the rock, I watched, motionless.

The birds actually seemed to be held to the wall by some form of suction apparatus on their under bodies. But several times, when the pair changed places, I saw sharp little claws grip out from under the coat of feathers. Their legs were so short that they were completely concealed.

But now for the mystery of the building material!

Curiously, though they changed places quite often, neither of the pair ever left to replenish the supply of the stuff they were using. And here is the secret: it came from the bird's bill! Somewhere within the creature's body must have been a gland which gave abundant secretions.

The worker's bill, short and broad, but quite pointed, almost triangular in shape, was partly open. I inspected them as closely as I dared without interfering with them. My patience was rewarded. I saw a thin, silvery thread issue unbrokenly from the bill. It was not unlike the thread formed between one's fingers when taking a pinch of glue or varnish and separating the fingers slowly. I saw the little tongue flick at the rock every time the head reached the extreme of its motion to one side. The thread stuck to the rock like the glue it appeared to be. To the other side the bird's head would sway, very slowly. During the course of the motion the thread was deposited upon the edge of the previously formed layers. Then came another flick of the tongue just as the head reversed its motion.

Untiringly the worker kept this up, applying layer after layer of the sticky,

transparent substance until the thread gave out. Then, with the least possible loss of time, the pair would change places. There never was any argument whether each was doing its proper share of the job.

Almost imperceptibly, while the minutes grew to an hour, I saw the nest increase in depth and width. The congealing threads meanwhile formed a lustrous, ivory-white, grained structure. Something like a section of a basket, built up of countless threads previously dipped in glue.

Very carefully, lest I should annoy the birds, I touched my finger to the newly made part. It yielded to the touch like soft rubber. But a quick peck at my finger by the worker's mate's bill, reminded me that eyes may watch, but that hands must be kept off.

Hundreds of nests in the course of construction were within my reach without moving from the ledge upon which I crouched. All of them were growing at the same rate. Whenever I became tired of watching one pair and directed my attention to another, I was greeted with the friendly "chip" of the worker's mate. As much as to say, "Well, stranger, what do you think of our handiwork? Not so bad, what?"

What more profound peace and harmony could be found on this earth than above the smooth, heaving waters of that cave below savage Vanua Lava?

CHAPTER VII

ESCAPE

AT LAST a dull pounding around the cave's mouth made me look down. The tide had fallen until the top of the arched entrance was awash. Between heaves of the swell the sun's rays were stabbing inward at glistening white foam. The afternoon must have been well advanced. I had to wait fully an hour before I could get out. Mac would be mad about my leaving the ship without saying a word to him. I had to bring some sort of peace offering.

Now my attention was directed toward the abandoned nests. I started to work, prying them off the rock with my sheath knife. They were not as hard to remove as I had expected after learning about their glue-like composition. But they were filled almost to the tops with old feathers. While I worked I was in a regular cloud of small feathers. And that sticky slime which covered me from head to foot! Before the boat was half filled with its cargo of nests I must have looked like some medicine man in full regalia.

Upon emerging from the cave my first glance at the outside world caught the two charred masts of the unfortunate schooner. I had actually forgotten about her, but now, having viewed what probably no other white man had ever seen and lived to disclose to doubting ears, those spars loomed up like monuments to men who might have died a most agonizing death.

Yes, their heads might have been among those on the hearth. Baked, smoke blackened, it would have been impossible to determine the race any of them had belonged to.

I certainly felt relieved when I saw the ship safely rolling at her anchor. But the welcome which greeted me when I drew alongside was quite different from what I had expected.

The whole crew was lined up along the rail. Mac was there, but he was not fuming and cursing. He heaped no maledictions upon my head. But at first he kept me at a loss to understand whether he was joking or had lost his senses. However, the rest of the crew, too, acted queer.

The business ends of half a dozen rifles eyed me rather coldly. Mac was brandishing his favorite pistol, which at the moment looked about the size of a bowchaser of a cruiser. He brandished it so as to make the sign language with which he addressed me plain enough for the most stupid savage to understand.

"He too much big devil-devil fella will get on board here damn lively!" he roared. "He will shake a leg before I blow daylight through him. Where did he fella get him boat?"

"Huh?" I forestalled further vituperation. "You gone crazy?"

Now it was Mac's and the others' turn to look surprised. Devil-devil doctors do not inquire about white men's sanity in plain English.

"Wha—what the hell!" Mac sputtered, lowering his weapon.

"Yes, it's me, All-Hands-And-Cook!" I put in hastily. "What's gone wrong with your eyes?"

"Well I'll be damned!" swore Mac, holstering the cannon. Seemingly a load dropped off his chest. "You young fool —I don't know what you been up to, but your disguise is perfect."

Again my turn to be surprised.

"My disguise? I repeated. "Say—"

An Irishman, who once upon a time had tried his luck on a cattle ranch in America's woolly West, suddenly broke the spell which had gripped us all.

"Th' niggers got a holt o' him an' tarred an' feathered him, an' that's no joke!"

Now there *was* an uproar on board. Everybody was at the height of his delight, and all at my expense. I could not get a word in edgewise. At last Kennedy shouted for order, to be careful not to spoil our reputation of being devils. Then he went for me.

"You dirty devil," he scolded good humoredly. "What you been doin' with yourself? You ought to look in a glass before you clean up. We ought to shoot you rather than let you step on our deck. What's that junk you got there in the boat?"

"Birds' nests," I retorted, trying to rid myself of some of my plumage with salt water.

"Well, you must have been robbin' chimney swallows," said Mac. "For Pete's sake shake a leg on board an' don't sit there with your tongue in a trap. Tell us what happened."

IT WAS NEARLY five o'clock in the afternoon. It took me a good hour before I was through scrubbing myself with soft soap and soda softened salt water. During the task I related my discoveries.

"And what makes you think that they get the draft for their fire only around full moon?" demanded Tom incredulously, when I once more resembled a second mate.

"Quite simple," I said. "The swell won't make any draft in the tunnel unless the mouth of the cave is submerged. It never gets fully submerged except during Spring tides. During the neap tides there's no draft."

"How about new moon? That's a Spring tide too," Cockney said.

But Mac's fertile brain was already hard at work.

"Don't you see?" he demanded. "To the blacks new moon means nothing because they can't see it. When they hear the puffin' around that hole they think the devil, or whoever they believe to be in the hole, is just bluffin'. But when he starts up again a couple of weeks later an' the moon is lookin' them full in the face, they think he is about ready to jump at them an' it's time to keep him from gettin' too rambunctious."

"Yeah," drawled Kennedy. "Very nice, but from what All-Hands tells us about them baked heads, they don't do it with fire alone. Maybe last full moon they found that the crew of the schooner came in handy. An' tomorrow night it's full moon again."

"Meaning that we might come handy tomorrow?" I suggested. "I thought that we were devils and they'd leave us alone."

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't tell just yet. They might be playin' fox so's to get us off our guard. I think a little more scare thrown into 'em beforehand won't do any harm."

"Well, what do you suggest to do?" demanded Mac. "Shoot off some rockets?"

The conversation seemed to have developed into a quarterdeck parley. That meant that all hands were invited to advance ideas. Kennedy's and Mac's remarks about scaring the natives had made Cockney's face light up with a sudden thought.

"If ye want fireworks that'll scare them natives," he piped up, "I says blow up their damn contraption."

"Stow your jokin', Bosun," growled Mac disgustedly. "When you're dealin' with such fanatics as these natives it's a serious matter."

Cockney was the picture of wounded feelings.

"An' don't I know it, Skipper?" he retorted. "Ain't I been sailin' with ye long enough to know the blacks? But I arsks you, what did we do to th' stew pits in Guadalcanar? We blew 'em t' hell!"

"This ain't Guadalcanar, Cockney," countered Mac. "You know how we did the trick there, don't you? We bored out sticks of wood an' filled them with powder. You ought to know what a job you fellows had to smuggle the loaded sticks among the firewood."

Cockney had a little more brain than Mac gave him credit for.

"Say, Skipper," he expostulated, "if All-Hands had the nerve t' crawl through that hole in that cave afore it ever was done, there ain't no reason why two blokes can't do it now with a keg o' powder, see?"

"An' blow their own damn heads off?" demanded Mac.

Cockney was rewarded with the wildest ridicule on the part of his shipmates. But he was reassured by Tom, in whose brain an idea had germinated.

"Now, Skipper, if you'll listen to me," he said, "I'll show you that Cockney's got a little brain at that." Everybody was willing to listen and Tom started to divulge his plan. "There was a time when I studied chemistry. I know a little about explosives, so you won't have to worry about letting me monkey with such stuff. I can make a long fuse within half an hour, and with that we wouldn't have to stick Cockney's powder keg right into the fire. How's that?"

"Don't forget the strong draft," warned Kennedy. "If you patch a lot of fuse line together, it's liable to blow out at your joints."

"I said I'll make one myself that I'll be sure of not to blow out," retorted Tom. "It'll have to be long, though, 'cause it'll blaze pretty quick. I can light it in any draft with flint and steel and tinder."

Mac gave his thigh a resounding slap.

"By the Lord, Tom, we'll try it anyway," he said. "If your scheme works an' we blow that contraption to hell, we'll have the run of the island. It would solve all our problems at once."

CHAPTER VIII

WHITE MAN'S MAGIC

"NOW supposin' there won't be any fire tonight," speculated Kennedy before the preparations for the undertaking were completed. "What then? Do you think it advisable to blow the thing up anyway?"

"Why not?" demanded Mac. "It'll cause some consternation, all right. Besides that, I'm pretty sure they'll have their fun with that ruddy thing as long as there's a chance. Maybe two or three nights before an' after full moon. Even if they don't roast any victims tonight, they'll have some kind of ritual. It was goin' last night, wasn't it?"

We were ready for the perilous trip to the cave. As much as I detested the prospect of a second journey through that filthy tunnel, I had to go. I knew the lay of the land. Tom volunteered because he would not trust any one else with the fuse he had made. But Mac insisted that there should be three in the party. Bunk, Cockney and some of the more adventurous of the crew cast lots.

The dice selected Bunk. Each of us

three armed with bush knife and pistol, we started on our journey.

I watched my companions' faces closely while steering the gig through the entrance to the cave. The effect their first glimpse of the interior had upon them was as I expected. Both rested their oars and looked about in rapturous wonder.

"Gee!" ejaculated Bunk. "You'd almost think you're goin' through—" He seemed to be at loss for an appropriate comparative term.

"D'you mean the gate of Paradise?" Tom grinned.

I could not blame them for showing signs of emotion, but it was just as well to revert their minds toward the serious problem of our mission.

"The gate of Paradise, like the fine clothes of people whose object is to deceive you," I replied, "is a great delusion. Before we get through tonight, boys, you'll think that you entered the gate of hell."

"Croaker!" reproached Tom. "You won't let a fellow enjoy life while there's a chance, will you?"

"Hell, what can you expect of a second mate?" challenged Bunk.

Tom left joking aside and began to be interested in the birds.

"I'd like to find out a little more about that nest building," he reflected, looking around. "You know I've eaten those things and I'd like to know just what I've been eating."

"Then you've enjoyed eatin' the birds' saliva," chuckled Bunk. "Ain't you heard enough of it yet?"

I left both men upon a rock ledge and started for the throat of the tunnel. I wanted to reconnoiter, to find out whether there was as yet any activity in the temple. Since I knew the tunnel to be devoid of danger there was no need of proceeding cautiously. The journey was negotiated in but a fraction of the time it took in the morning.

Approaching the end of the sloping flue, I was suddenly smothered and blinded by a cloud of dust and ashes, drawn downward by the reversed draft. I had to stop to clear my smarting eyes and it took considerable effort to suppress a fit of sneezing and coughing. Then, as I stopped to listen, there came a babel of distant voices, chanting voices, and the scraping sound of something like rakes being drawn over a rough surface.

A good thing that I had gone on the tour of investigation. Along with the dust came showers of sparks.

Smoldering embers of last night's fire must have been kept alive, buried under the ashes. Had we been rash enough to attempt planting our charge of powder, our mission might have ended right then. Without hesitating I hurried back to the ledge.

Bunk and Tom were as I had left them. Being men of education, they had engaged upon a scientific discussion of the cave's origin. Some freak of a volcanic upheaval, they called it. The immense rock which formed the cliff under which this one and the other caves were, had been hurled there by an eruption, possibly from the high peak which was some miles back of the shore. Erosion by water, coming from some source above, had gouged out the tunnel while following the seam left between the loose rock and bedrock upon which it rested. Quite a feasible theory, since the surface above the cliff was hollowed out like an immense basin.

But such discussions could be deferred to some more opportune time. I changed the subject.

"We might get ourselves into an eruption if we don't do something to protect our powder when we take it in. The niggers are getting busy and I was bombarded by sparks."

THAT brought them both back to the present. Tom grinned, tapping the powder keg with his hand.

"I don't mind handling tons of this stuff," he said, "but I'll be damned if I care to handle an ounce with sparks

flying around. We got to do something to protect ourselves."

The whole scheme did not look so very good just then. Being practically in command, I felt the responsibility for success. All of a sudden there came an idea.

"Tom, do you think it would interfere with your fuse if we wrapped the keg in wet seaweeds and pushed some of 'em ahead of us?" I asked. "Do you think a little moisture would hurt your fuse?"

"Good for you!" applauded Tom. "A few drops of water won't hurt the fuse. It's made of sail twine and sulphur with a little saltpeter. A wadding of seaweeds behind the keg would tend to make the explosion much more effective."

While there was still sufficient daylight we started to load the gig with the weeds, which covered the rock walls below the surface. The ever present boat hook proved a handy implement for dislodging and pulling up the tough growth. But the task had its perils. More than once we had to use the handy bush knives we carried to slash at some protesting tentacle which wound itself around the pole.

Since we did not know just how great a menace of flying sparks we would have to combat, we made sure to reap a generous harvest. That eagerness for success almost led to disaster.

It must have been past sundown. The slowly closing mouth of the cave was turning to a dull gray. Only a dull light came up from the water. Phosphorescence could already be seen in the disturbed depth. The load we had accumulated besides our own weight left but a few inches of freeboard to the boat.

For one last haul the pole descended to hook into a cluster of glistening, waving algae. Suddenly, like a flash, a snake-like arm shot up near the pole and hooked itself over the gunwale of the boat.

The side went down within half an inch of being pulled under. Tom was standing on top of our unstable load. Due to the sudden lurch he slipped and fell over toward the low side.

Simultaneously Bunk's and my own blade hacked at the thing which threatened to upset us. Angered by the wound, the monster below spat out its inky fluid. The water turned black and there we were. But little light came through the low opening, and in that dull dusk we were fighting an invisible foe, possibly one of gigantic size.

But strange, the very monster which threatened us saved Tom from going overboard. Once over the side it would have been certain death for him.

The tentacle had jerked the boat's side against the rock which it struck with a dull thud just as Tom fell. In his effort to balance himself he groped about and his hands pushed against the wall. That lucky push, accidentally timed with the rebound of the boat and the severing of the tentacle, steadied Tom and at the same time drove the boat toward the middle of the cave. It had not come a moment too soon. We heard other arms angrily thrashing the water close to our side!

"My Lord!" breathed Tom, slumping down upon the weeds, while I grabbed an oar and increased the distance as quickly as possible. "That was about as close as I care to come to one of them devils. And I've heard folks say that there's no such thing as luck!"

WE HAD brought a lantern which we had left on the shelf with the powder keg while loading the boat. After a few minutes of groping about, we found the shelf and struck a light. It was not difficult to do this since there was very little motion in the air of the spacious cave.

Tom and Bunk remained upon the shelf with the light while I made another spying trip through the tunnel. I was getting so used to the thing that I did not mind it any more than going through a dark hall in a house.

But now there was a difference above.

No sparks or ashes came down. The hearth might have been charged with fuel, but the cool backdraft informed me that no fires had been started. Of course, the tide was not high enough to put much force into the draft.

However, bedlam had broken loose. Tom-toms were being pounded, conch shell horns were droning and there was an unearthly racket of yelling and chanting. The time for getting our charge ready was near at hand. If we had packed the seaweed in too soon the draft might have dried it too much and our mine might have gone off before we were able to get out of the tunnel. One has to remember all such details when embarking on such an undertaking.

When I returned, my eyes being accustomed to the impenetrable darkness of the tunnel, the cave with its shimmering sides and top illuminated by the dull reddish light of the lantern, had the appearance of some chamber in the inferno.

The birds must have been frightened by the unusual light. They were fluttering about aimlessly. Their magnified shadows were scurrying over the walls, the ceiling and the glossy floor.

Bunk and Tom, glowing a dull orange with the lantern between them, looked like Satan and his grand vizier sitting crosslegged on the throne. They were conversing and their voices had a peculiar, hollow boom. The mouth of the cave was awash.

"Come on, boys," I shouted, without giving previous warning of my silent approach. "Turn to for the fun. The natives are getting our dinner ready."

The two of them were so startled that they almost fell off the rock.

We unloaded the gig at the entrance of the tunnel. The kelp we divided into heaps not too bulky to be pushed ahead of a creeping man.

If the cave had looked spooky in the dim lantern light, the tunnel certainly gave one the impression of waking up in a grave. A good thing that the lantern was of the type called a cyclone lantern. Anything else would have blown out where we worked now. At that the flame which was screened so as to withstand the hardest gales which blow on the ocean was kept in continuous play. It kept our black shadows dancing about the rough walls with the most grotesque contortions. The walls themselves appeared to be in motion, looked as if they were slowly closing in.

Off we started. I was in the lead, pushing a heap of kelp along the floor and rolling the keg of powder, very gingerly to be sure. Tom was close behind me, carrying his precious fuse, wrapped up in canvas. He, too, pushed a heap of kelp. Bunk fetched up in the rear with the lantern and another heap.

I believe the venture began to get on the others' nerves. They kept up as much conversation as the howling and hooting around them permitted. Just a line of idle patter, such as men who fear that they might crack under the strain will indulge in. I knew the signs and shouted at them to stop and take it easy for a minute. When men talk about the balmy days of long ago under a strain like that, it is time to cheer them up.

In one of my hip pockets there was a flask of rum. That did the trick. Both became more cheerful.

"I was tellin' Tom that I'd studied for the ministry when I was in college," Bunk tried to make light of his senseless babble. "A fine minister I turned out to be, gettin' ready to blow up a place of worship. Ain't life hell?"

"It is, but don't let's get each other's nerve now," I counseled. "After you've been through here a couple of times you won't mind it at all."

Tom took a second sip of the bottle, then forced a somewhat hollow laugh.

We started on our way once more. None of us said a word. At times I heard Tom's breath close behind me; that is, I heard it during the calms when the air current reversed. The only sounds which came from Bunk were occasional pantings and spatterings dur-

ing the calm spells between puffs of the draft.

Where the sloping flue began we left the keg of powder and the fuse. In that narrow, confined space one could not handle so many things at once. Our object was to build a bank of wet weeds before taking a chance with the explosive. And the wisdom of that precaution was manifested when we reached our destination.

AHEAD and upward we crawled. Tom now carried only the light. That was all a man could handle in that flue. With the middle man acting as light carrier, both Bunk and I got what little benefit could now be derived from it. And to handle the bulky piles of kelp was a harder job than we had expected.

The dim rays filtering past me and my load revealed the stone shelf at the base of the pit below the altar. I was almost exhausted, was forced to stretch out and regain my breath. The others, too, required no urging to follow my example.

As yet the downdraft carried neither smoke nor sparks, a sign that the fire had not been started. My ears were covered with the slime of the hole and I heard the racket above but dimly. Tom, having but a light load which he had to handle with care, did not get himself plastered up so badly, therefore his hearing must have been less impaired.

All of a sudden he acted rather strangely. At first I thought that he was trying to urge me to hurry with the work, for he repeatedly gripped my knee and shook it impatiently.

"Wait a minute," I said as loud as I dared. "I want to get some of this stuff out of my ears and hear what's going on up there before it's too late."

I started to remove some of the grime with a piece of kelp, but for some reason, not clear to me then, my words had not calmed Tom. Instead of desisting, he started to crawl forward, squeezing his body into what little space there was left beside me. He placed his lips close to my ear.

"I heard something drop right there ahead of you. Can you hear me?" he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Something drop?"

"Yes, something dropped down on that stone there ahead of you. I can't see it, but I heard it."

"Stay back there and keep that light screened with your hand so it won't throw my shadow," I said.

"Be careful now," warned Tom.

But I was already moving forward. No, I did not move through my own volition. Providence moved me, for the most ghastly exhibition of fiendish cruelty revealed itself. I discovered the purpose of the manhole in the hearth.

I was in utter darkness. The bedlam of yells, the hollow booms of the tom-toms, the drones of the horns were as close to me as I cared to have them. My hands were cautiously, only an inch higher at a time, groping over the sticky grime on the stone side of the four-foot shelf.

My fingers bent over the edge. Carefully I moved them to and fro. Nothing but the sticky grime seemed to be there. I reached a little farther over the surface. Slipped my hands sidewise again. Somewhere near the middle of the top stone I felt something solid.

I started to feel around it. It seemed to be the end of a stout wooden pole. That must have been the thing which had made the thud Tom had heard.

Yes, it was a pole. It stood upright. My fingers slipped higher. They encountered something else. Something that had been wound around it. Something rough. Rope made of the fiber of coconut husks. Impulsively I withdrew my hands. Then I explored the surface of the shelf again. Did this with both hands far apart, then moved them slowly toward each other. Sticky grime and pieces of bone. Then something which did not yield before my touch.

As I tried to ascertain its shape, I cried out with alarm and surprise.

"Good God!" came a groan from above.

My hands were gripping a pair of shoes!

Let those who claim that prayer is of no avail amend their verdict. For the falsehood of such a claim was proven to me then.

At the first touch I recoiled so that I struck my head against the stone lining of the pit behind me. My first impulsive thought was that the place was haunted. I would have fled, but—

"Oh God, I feel—"

The rest of the ejaculation was drowned by the mad bedlam. The vicious creatures surrounding the place seemed to have suddenly lost all reason. An acrid smell of pitch torches came at me. Then a dim glow of light began to filter down. The fire was about to be started.

What happened next I could not possibly describe. I acted in too much of a daze. All I could see was the rough fiber strands around the stout pole and begrimed cotton trousers.

Out came my sheath knife. I threw caution to the winds. Vicious slashes along the pole, and the fiber strands dropped on my hands. The pole toppled against the rim of the pit. I tore at something, the shape of which I was hardly aware.

And down into the flue I slipped, dragging something that felt limp and heavy!

I remember my feet kicking against Tom's head. Tom's yell of surprise, demanding to know whether I had gone crazy.

"Those devils! A white man!" was all I could utter.

The next thing I saw Tom sliding downward with the lantern. I too, seemingly without effort, slipped downward, holding on to something which felt like a pair of ankles. My burden might have been a wooden dummy for all the thought I could collect at the time.

"Look out for the powder keg!" I heard Tom and Bunk yell in chorus.

The first thing I really saw with clear visual impression was Tom and Bunk bending over the limp body of a man in the larger part of the tunnel.

"Is he dead?" queried Bunk excitedly, without trying to press me for information.

Tom did not give me time to answer.

"Blow the damn thing to hell!" he shouted. "Even if we go up with it!"

That brought us into action.

We left the man there on the stone floor. Dead or alive, we had no time now for anything but the purpose for which we had come. Tom grabbed the fuse. I pushed the powder keg into the flue and rolled it up the slope. Thus we went up toward the pit. Bunk followed with the light.

Acrid smoke choked us when we neared the top. We made no effort to suppress coughs. Noise did not matter now, since the bedlam above killed every other sound.

Soon there would be a cough which no human fiends could drown!

SPARKS were showered upon my head. The timely thought about the wet kelp had been a lucky one; without it we would not have lived to finish our job.

The screening was pushed as close to the pit as it was possible. The keg deeply imbedded. Then I pulled the plug from the head of the keg, and Tom handed me the end of his fuse. My hands were shaking as I inserted it and covered part of it with the small heap of powder which poured from the open plug hole.

We retreated in almost a panic. Nevertheless we took care in uncoiling the charged string while we slipped backward. A careless pull would have withdrawn the end of the fuse from the keg, then all our trouble would have been of no avail.

Tom had been generous with his work. The fuse reached well beyond the lower

extreme of the sloping flue.

Bunk and I half carried, half dragged the poor wretch we had rescued toward the end of the tunnel while Tom got busy with flint, steel and tinder made of scorched canvas. We left the lantern with him. Success now depended upon him and he certainly needed light since he might have to retreat through the uneven passage in great haste after touching off the fuse.

We did not know that we had reached the boat until my elbow struck against the stem. Then we carefully placed our burden across the thwarts. We were too excited to attempt finding out whether the man were dead. Neither thoughts nor words came as we sat huddled upon the boat's gunwale, staring into the darkness, waiting.

I began to shake violently, would have carried away, but just at the critical moment came the sound of hurrying, bare feet. A dull glow drew nearer and nearer. At last Tom's stooping figure was revealed in the circle of light. He, too, was shaking with excitement as he dashed toward us. Though we three had watched for the meeting some seconds before it took place we could not suppress exclamations of surprise.

"It's going!" shouted Tom, his teeth chattering. "Hurry up, out of here!"

Bunk just rolled over backward into the boat. Tom, carrying the light, stumbled as he stepped over the gunwale. I heard the lantern clatter upon a thwart, but had no time to see whether it was extinguished. In their haste the others had forgotten that the boat's keel rested on the rock bottom. I was knee deep in water, among a tangle of the weeds we had left there. With my shoulder against the bow I pushed frantically, shouting wildly for the others to use an oar to help me. The boat hardly budged. Then, once more events followed each other so quickly, took such sudden changes that there was no time for coherent thought.

Something—it seemed like a terrific puff of wind—drove the boat away from my straining shoulder.

BOOOOM! came a roar. I lurched headlong and the next thing I was floundering among phosphorescence and tangled strings!

I had a blurred mental vision of encircling, snaky arms. Every strand of weed was one of those arms. I believe I never was so panicky in my life as I beat the water with arms and legs.

Suddenly one of my hands came down upon something solid. I clutched at it with a death grip. It was the gunwale of the boat, but momentarily I did not recognize it as such.

"Lord, you had me scared stiff!" came Bunk's voice close to my ear. "How'd it happen? The way you kicked up the water I thought a devil fish got hold of you. Did you slip?"

"Slip! No, you damn fool, I jumped. Why didn't you fellows give me a hand?"

A short spasm of anger had driven my panic away. Then I saw that the lantern had gone out, and it did not take much urging to make me clamber into the boat.

"We couldn't get hold of the oars quick enough," came Bunk's voice with a note of relief. "The lantern went out when Tom dropped it. He's tryin' to light it now. We'd dropped the stiff right on top of the oars, an' before we could get them out from under the blast went off. Did you hear it?"

"Hear it!" I echoed. "Yes, and I felt it. It's a wonder the boat didn't go over."

"Damn near did," said Bunk with a shudder. "She's half full of water. Well, thank the Lord it's over. I guess it meant the end of your fire."

"And the end of a good many of the devils, I hope."

From a few feet away came the clicking of steel upon flint. Each click was accompanied by a shower of red sparks.

"I'll have her lit in a minute," said Tom. "Lucky my tinder didn't get wet."

I regained my composure.

"Bunk, let's look after the stranger,"

I said. "With all this water in the boat he might get drowned."

"He's probably past drownin'," replied Bunk. "I wonder—say, did all this really happen or are we just plain balmy?"

"I will be if this stuff don't catch a spark pretty soon," exploded Tom. "This's been a little too much for one night."

Leaving Tom with his work, we started to feel around on the man's body. His heart was still beating, very faintly.

"His head is bleedin'. I can feel the blood on my fingers," Bunk's voice came in awed, subdued tones. "Where could he have come from? Lord, I'm still expectin' to wake up."

"His hands are still tied to his sides," I supplemented Bunk's announcement. "That's the reason why he could be handled with so little trouble. He must have hit his head against the edge of the stone and it knocked him out. Could he be from that schooner?"

"Shut up! Don't let's talk about that schooner now," barked Bunk. "Let's see what we can do for him now."

In silence I cut the coarse strands which bound the unconscious man's hands to his sides. My jaw was clamped tightly to keep my teeth from chattering.

Is it a wonder then that my blood froze, my heart almost stopped beating when I heard a long drawn out groan?

"This fellow here is coming to," I said. "Hurry up with the light, Tom."

The beating of Tom's steel became frantic. At times the shower of sparks was so thick that it actually brought out his features. Then, at last, his patience was rewarded. Through the darkness came a dull reddish glow, like a distant beacon on a dangerous shore.

"At last," muttered Tom.

The glow spread and grew brighter. Then the tinder burst into flame. Bunk seized the lantern and tore the storm cover which formed its base open. In an instant the wick caught the flame. We were able to see.

The first thing I saw was staring eyes in hollow sockets, a haggard, corpse-like face and colorless, quivering lips.

Bunk held the lantern close and Tom rushed to our assistance.

IX

FATHER DELANEY

THE poor wretch we had rescued from the most horrible torture was conscious, but he was yet too dazed to realize that he was on earth. His lips were trembling as if he made efforts to speak, but words would not come forth.

I tore one of the sleeves from my shirt and swabbed the man's face and hands with salt water.

"Wash the cut on his head," advised Tom. "The salt will kill any bugs that might stick there and it'll stop the blood quicker."

The cut did not amount to much. It was but a scalp wound from which very little blood issued. And the bite of the brine in the open wound had a decidedly resuscitating effect. He blinked his eyes a few times, shook his head as if he tried to rid himself of the annoyance, and at last raised a hand in an attempt to make me desist.

Now he emitted another low moan and struggled to gain a sitting posture.

"Let him sit upright," counseled Tom. "It'll help check the bleeding. There now. It's letting up quite a bit."

I continued the salt water applications while Tom supported the man. Bunk got busy bailing out the boat and kept her from drifting near the sides of the cave.

Of a sudden the patient's senses returned. He looked about him bewildered. Shuddered and then gasped—

"Where am I?" He stared about with wide open eyes.

"You're in good hands now, my friend," said Tom reassuringly. "Don't feel alarmed. You're safe." Then to me,

"Give him a drink from your bottle."

I held the bottle to the man's lips, but he took only a small swallow.

"Liquor!" he sputtered as if he half doubted his sense of taste. "Are—are you—?"

"Yes, we're white men," assured Tom. "Don't worry; we got you away from the natives. We're English. Crew of the bark *Emma P.* Come, take another swig at the bottle."

The man obeyed, this time without signs of suspicion.

"But, friends, where am I?" he queried in an awed voice after staring about once more. "This—this isn't—"

"You're all right now," I said. "Just sit still for awhile. You're in a cave; we dragged you down here after getting you away from the blacks. But who are you? How'd you get to the island?"

The man looked at me as if he were surprised, then answered:

"Who—why, I am Father Delaney. I'm a missionary. Came here—if—if this is the same place—" Again he gazed about as though he still doubted the reality of the strange surroundings. Then, "I came from the Fiji Islands. Came with the schooner *Hallet.* She was wrecked on the coast of—"

"Yes, yes," I tried to aid the priest. "Wrecked on the coast of Vanua Lava. There's the sunken hull of a burnt schooner right outside of this cave. Do you remember now?"

The man nodded slowly, as if painful memories were being awakened anew. I exchanged meaningful glances with Bunk and Tom. Was about to press for further information when the man slumped forward, the picture of despair.

"God in heaven, men!" he groaned, holding his head in his hands. "Whatever miracle you worked to save me from that hell, I'll never understand; but don't tell me that you brought me away alone."

Now we did stare at each other in speechless horror. Tom was the first to find his words.

"Alone!" he echoed. "Man, don't tell us that there are others above there!"

The exclamation which left no doubt that but one rescue had been made appeared to have shattered some last ray of hope. With an agonized groan the priest buried his face in his hands and his body shook as he sobbed.

"God forgive me for the words," he moaned, "but why did He save me for worse torture than the torture of the flesh? Men, I know you are brave lads. Don't falter now. Tell me the truth. What did you see up there in that hell?"

"We saw nothing," the three of us burst out in chorus. "We pulled you down through a hole which connects with the thing they had you on."

Came moments of terrible silence. Then our hearing played cruel tricks. At least, it appeared to be tricks.

"Then my Jeany has suffered the torture I've been spared!" croaked the man. "Lads, take me back whence you brought me."

Preposterous! Even after the lapse of seconds, with the words re-echoing in our minds again and again, we did not realize that we had heard aright. Then Bunk broke the spell.

"Your—your who? Did you say—?" His voice came to me as though I heard it above a din. "Man, are you sure?"

The man's reply came so convincingly that the last vestige of doubt as to his sanity, the hope that he might be the victim of a delusion, was wiped away.

"Only too sure, lads. That is why I'm grieving. I'm too stricken to tell you much now, but Jeany—Jean Bradley—understand? She's but a frail lassie, but brave. She is a daughter of my dead sister. She's always clung to my side. She came with me on this mission. The devils of this island caught her, as they did me. The last I saw her, they had her in a cage of bamboo, just big enough for her to stand in. They had her facing the devilish altar on which they were torturing me. God knows what's been her fate."

TO BE CONTINUED

Up to the Sky in Ships

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

A Story of the Air Mail

PILOT RUTTER was on the Nevada end of the Reno-San Francisco air mail run. Rutter's closest flying pal, Miller, was on the Bay City end of the same tough stretch of airway. Each man was marking time, watching the sky, and wondering where so much punk weather was coming from. Cause enough for wonder!

There was snow in Reno. And down on the Bay, as usual, there was a great muchness of rain, and it was a rain that could hardly get by as an Oregon mist. Also, there was a bitter cold, cloud tossed sky over Reno. Double checking that, again on the bay, the city at the Golden Gate was tightly locked by a wall of pea-green murk that stood up from the wet Pacific and pushed in, eastward, for miles. And all the way between these two cities of unusual weather, according to the reports reaching each end, rotten going blanked the world. The high Sierras, north and south and east and west, were white; and the low valleys, seaward on the western shed, were without visibility. All in all, it was one swell day to pace a flying office and wait for a new deal.

However, Pilots Rutter and Miller weren't office pacers. They weren't inside aviators, not by a long shot! They were airmen.

Anyway, mighty close to a mile above sea level, Pilot Rutter paced that office floor in free'n'easy Reno. Long since, the mail which Rutter was to relay to the coast had arrived from the next

control east, Elko. That Elko pilot, arriving at nine o'clock, had made his way through only after battling his ship for all of four long hours. And, as a rule, the Elko-Reno push can be knocked down without killing more than two hours on the wing. However, the sky east of Reno wasn't half bad; and that pilot had had fair visibility all the way. Still, and this was hard to take, if one pilot can come west as far as Reno, then the next bird should be able to hop off and deliver the mail on the western edge of Uncle Sam's vast playground.

Hop right out and deliver the stuff! That, at least, is the way the thing is figured by those who do not know. Airmen, though, are in a position to know that the sky can be swell right here, but over there—just beyond that hump of cloud smoking peaks—well, she can be just plain dirty. Anyway, there's no way of comparing high Sierra weather with any other sort or brand of weather; to say nothing of the assortment of queer skies that pilots are likely to find down around San Francisco town. Which skies are just about the worst on record.

Rutter watched the hands of the clock tell off 11 A.M.

"Half the day gone," he remarked, "and no cakes earned yet."

Rutter was speaking to the field manager. They were alone in the small office. The manager looked up from whatever he was doing at the desk and said:

"You should work up a sweat, Rutter. There'll be lots o' mail to be flown when you and me's both dead. Got a cig?"

Rutter lighted one for himself too, and grinned. Then, pacing again, he decided:

"One thing I'm thankful for. Miller's landlocked at the other end, not me. And old Jingle Bells will be there, tearing his hair and trying to tell Miller to rise and fly."

The one dubbed Jingle Bells was the Western Division super. His real, official name was J. N. Bell. He had come out from the East nearly a year before; and the guy wasn't really half bad, in spite of the fact that Rutter, Miller and a few others couldn't seem to cotton to him. That was natural enough too. Rutter and Miller, in the early days of air mail, had known more than one official who had no right in air. For instance, there was Super John A. Googan, he who had made famous the words—The Mail Must Go.

That is a fine sounding slogan. Perhaps Googan meant well. But there were times when the mail could not go—via air. Googan sent too many pilots across the Great Divide.

So, after Googan's reign of terror, the air mail pilots and macs were inclined to treat all officials roughly. Somehow or other, as a rule, these higher officials did not fit. They were not of air, so knew little or nothing of air. And airmen felt that they should not be sent out to fly hostile skies by such men as these.

Super Bell had arrived on the Western Division during a very trying time, which, perhaps, was kind of rough on him. It was this way. A month before Bell's coming, Pilot Danny Arley had gone lost. Danny was still lost. Never had a trace of him, his ship or mail cargo been found. And that mail cargo! Some said that Danny's load, on that last trip, was more valuable than any air mail shipment ever before made. No wonder air mail was up in the air in more ways than usual.

All ships of the Western Division had searched for the lost pilot. For two solid weeks that search persisted, full quota, all ships. When the big hunt was called off it was called off only because all equipment had been flown ragged, for it was in the dead of winter. However, by special permission, Rutter, Miller and two other pilots had continued to carry on the seemingly hopeless quest.

Then came this man Bell and washed out all search flying.

Rutter and Miller flew a tough mis-

sion on Super Bell's office carpet. It was a hot session. It got them nothing. Bell was boss. And what's more, and worse, Super Bell said:

"I say we're through with this aerial search. This useless flying has cost air mail four ships since Pilot Arley failed to show. There'll be no more of that! And, in closing, let me say that I am of the opinion that we are looking in the wrong place for this so called lost pilot. Now you men mull that over!"

Well, Rutter and Miller did mull that over, and it was very hard to take. But again, Bell was boss. So Rutter and Miller went back to being just mailmen. Time flew and months passed. But Super Bell was just Jingle Bells, which he didn't seem to mind at all.

And Rutter now paced Reno's air mail office on just such a Winter day as had blotted out Pilot Danny Arley.

"Jingle Bells is as bad as Googan," the field manager said to Rutter. "He's trying to tell the pilots when to fly. That's none of his business, Rutter! Yep, he's a Googan, all right."

Rutter laughed a dry hinge sort of laugh.

"You're right," he agreed. "And, as I said before, I'm glad that Miller is in Frisco."

Along toward eleven-thirty Pilot Rutter stopped pacing and rubbed enough frost from the window to allow a peek at the outside world.

"You know," he said, after a little delay, "I begin to guess that maybe I'll be able to rise and fly pretty darned soon now. She doesn't look too bad; and the low clouds are beginning to get up off the ground. I can almost see the roof of Mt. Rose. That's not bad at all."

"Yeh, you might make it," the field manager agreed; and added, "But you're sure welcome to the dish, brother. Lap it up."

Rutter paced that small office some more, for a flying man late on his getaway can never remain still, like the rest of men.

AT QUARTER to twelve the telephone rang. The field manager, waiting for the Reno office to put his long distance party on, said:

"San Francisco calling, Rutter . . . Hello, Frisco. Yep, this is air mail, Reno. Field manager talking . . . Weather? Plenty bad . . . Eh? Well, perhaps it's getting better. Yep, Rutter was just saying that he guessed he could rise and fly."

There was a break in the conversation. That break was due to delay at the Bay City end. Reno's field manager could tell that the San Francisco field manager was holding an aside conversation with somebody in that Western office. Presently Frisco spoke again.

"The super would like to have Rutter on the wire," that faraway Pacific voice made known.

"Here, Rutter," the field manager snapped. Then low, "Old Jingle Bells wants to have a word with his white haired boy."

"I'll white haired boy you!" Rutter snapped, booting the field manager where a boot does a world of good, and taking over the phone. "Rutter speaking."

"Hello, Rutter," Jingle Bells yelled through one hundred eighty-odd miles of small, over mountain wire. "Listen. Rutter, the sky isn't too bad here. We should get the mail through, Rutter. We're making a devil of a rotten showing on this division this month. Three times that we've been tied up. Can't you come across, Rutter?"

Pilot Rutter, with "get the mail through" and "devil of a rotten showing" ringing in his good right ear, wanted to yell no; but he said yes. That is, Rutter said:

"Guess I can get off and climb up over this mess. She begins to look brighter at this end. I'll try."

"That's the spirit, Rutter," the super said. "You—"

Again the conversation had died on the San Francisco end. Rutter could

hear the receiver jar on the Bay City desk, and he was getting set to hang up at his end when the San Francisco field manager called:

"Hello, hello, Rutter? Say, Rutter, old Jingle Bells just rushed out to grab a car for town. Anything you want to know?"

"Yeh," Rutter said. "Did Miller get away yet?"

"I'll say he did," the Frisco field manager made known. "He got away in a cloud of dust, Rutter. Not a half hour ago."

"How come? What do you mean?" Rutter pressed, knowing that there was some meaning out of the ordinary in the Frisco man's words.

"Wait a second," the Bay City field manager stalled. "I want to see if the big noise really grabbed that car for town." A few seconds later his voice came into Reno again. "He's gone," he said. "Now about Miller, Rutter. That guy done gone and blowed up, and how!"

"And why?" Rutter asked.

"Jingle Bells tried to tell him to rise and fly."

"How was the sky?" Rutter asked.

"Just like it is now," the field manager told Rutter. "Right from here, Rutter, I can't see the other end of the runway. The sky is right on the ground. Been there all morning. No visibility at all. But listen, Rutter, don't you crack that I told you about this."

"Not a crack," Rutter promised.

"Are you going to give it a whirl, Rutter?"

"I said I'd try," Rutter answered.

"So did the Kaiser," barked San Francisco's man, "and look where the old wood-chopper is now. Lay off, Rutter."

"Well, see you later," Rutter said, and hung up.

Rutter turned to the Reno field manager.

"He's gone and done it," he snapped. "Jingle Bells has pulled a Googan. Told Miller to rise and fly. So it's pilots versus the field again."

Rutter explained the whole conversation to the field manager, adding the usual rough sayings anent Super Bell's status.

"And you promised to rise and fly?" the field manager asked.

"It's this way," Rutter explained. "If I don't hop Jingle Bells will say that Miller and I are ganging him. But if I do hop, and get through, that shows that the thing could be done. And it also puts the kibosh on Miller. I've got one out; I'll hop and go lost. Tell you what. You have the gang pull that old wreck, No. 157, out of the back of the hangar. It's served its day. How does that sound?"

"You're welcome to 157," said the field manager.

"Before you go," Rutter added, "let's get things straight. I don't want the gang looking for me, risking necks. You get Miller, by telephone, and give him the dope; and have him line up the pilots. Stall off the search. Say I took blankets and grub, and that I'll be jake for a few days. Now tell Miller that I'm going to that shack in Owens Valley, and he'll know. It's near Mono Lake. So I'll hop off west, then swing back east. And by the way, don't transfer the mail to 157. Say we forgot the mail in the rush."

The storm outside whistled and roared. Rutter climbed into his togs. 157's motor barked into life out on the line. Rutter watched from the window, and he was glad to note that no mail was put aboard. A few minutes later and Rutter was on the wing. And taken from view.

"The mail!" the field manager was yelling, in the hangar. "You boneheads! You forgot to load the mail! Toss it on that truck. Quick! I'll run it into town. I should fire the whole mob."

The hangar crew loaded the mail matter aboard the truck, telling the field manager that it didn't much matter

anyway, because Rutter wasn't going anyplace.

Arriving in Reno, a few miles from the mail field, the man with the sacks disposed of them at the post office. Then, going to a quiet telephone booth, he put in a call for Pilot Miller at the latter's San Francisco place of residence. Luckily, Miller was there.

"You're hired, fed and fired, Miller." the Reno manager told the pilot who, no doubt, was wondering who'd spend all this jack to give him a long distance buzz from Reno. "So stand by for orders, guy."

"Who thinks he's kidding me?" Miller asked. "You, Rutter?"

"Rutter, being a regular pilot, is flying," the voice from Reno answered, rubbing it in a bit. "This is Peel. We got word from Frisco that you were fired, and why. So Rutter asked me to give you a ring. He wants that you should stand at your window, safely out of the light rain, watch the sky and take notice how a regular ace comes through on a day like this."

"I'll pull up a chair and do that, Peel," Pilot Miller agreed, for Miller is pretty danged hard to kid. "And now that we've got that little matter out of the way, just why did you get me out of bed at this time of the afternoon?"

The Reno man talked for ten minutes straight, explaining the entire matter to Miller. Just once did he stop talking, and then only to tell Miller that he was going to reverse the charge on this very costly conversation.

"So, Miller," he concluded, "that's how she stands. It's up to you to stick close to the S. F. hangar and see that no search is started, unless Rutter fails to get in touch with us."

"Rutter!" Miller barked. "The crazy, half baked, suicidal monkey! Hopping out on a day like this! I wouldn't do it for my own brother, Peel. O. K., Peel. I'll take care of those things."

Then Miller hung up. For a long time, without moving, he sat there and stared at a vacant wall.

"Rutter," he said, half aloud, "the game's whitest white man. What a guy! Damn old Jingle Bells!"

Late that same afternoon the Reno and San Francisco air mail offices began to exchange more telephone communications. The super was doing the big end of the talking. One remark of his was quite outstanding, owing to the great spirit of sacrifice it contained.

"Very lucky there is no mail aboard Rutter's ship," he said; which slightly outstanding remark brought back memories of old John A. Googan. Old John A. was the boy who once said, "Pilots! I'll furnish half a dozen pilots for every one we lose. The mail must go!"

Very lucky there was no mail aboard the ship, but what about Rutter? Well, the super wasn't wasting any love on Rutter, for the super had Miller on his hands, to worry over, right there at the Bay City end of the run. What's more, Pilot Miller came into the Frisco office just at quitting time, with Rutter an hour overdue, and asked if it was true that Rutter had tried to come over the hump.

"He tried," the super said. "That's more than you'd do."

"And if he died in the try," Miller then added, "that's not more than you're likely to do."

"Which is much loud talk," the super remarked. "Miller, you are now on the outside looking in, so keep out of my affairs."

"Till Rutter is found," Pilot Miller stated, "I belong with air mail. If there's a search to be put on, air mail will need every pilot available, so don't you start anything you can't finish. If you try any strong arm methods, if you try to bar me from this field, well I promise you a party. Get that, and get it straight. The search is the thing that comes first. Any quarrel between you and me can wait. We'll settle that when the sun shines again. What's more, I have to make sure that Rutter or his ship is located. I'll need them to

prove that no man could fly over the hump today. You see, super, I have an idea that I'm not the one who is going to quit the service. Lord no, I've been with it too long."

TO GET back to Rutter, which is some backlapping from this point, that wild bird was lost from the minute he took off in that storm. At least, Rutter was cut away from Mother Earth from the time he turned east and droned back over the hangar, where the field manager alone marked his passing. No use talking, that storm took the willing guy; and when one of those high altitude, mountain bound storms takes a plane, well it's taken for the limit. Visibility just didn't exist. Snow and ice piled in fast; and the struts, wires and leading edges of the panels were soon heavy with that stuff that forces flying craft to the ground quicker than anything else. So it was a tough situation from the start.

Rutter, flying entirely on his instruments, made up his mind to do the desperate thing, and go up for altitude. Carrying that great cargo of thickening ice and snow, he knew that altitude was bound to come slowly, and reach its limit early. Maybe he couldn't get high enough to climb out over the storm. That would be bad, very bad to be forced down through a doubtful distance, then called upon to find the ground as the indicating hand of an altimeter acted as his only guide. However, even from the lower altitudes, it would have been impossible to locate the ground, except to smack it at miles and miles per hour.

Going higher offered hope, for there's a top to every storm. But going up in such a storm calls for so much in the line of grit that very few pilots can face the invitation. Rutter, though, had ridden the crest of many a mountain blizzard. He knew that it was one of life's greatest kicks, that thing of coming through. That is, if a man did come through. Oh, well, you can't expect to live forever. And Rutter had been everywhere and seen just about everything; so he could afford to be brave.

For nearly half an hour Rutter kept that ship in as hard a climb as it could stand. Fortunately the motor was good, and never dropped a shot. It was the time and place for a motor to do its stuff too. Failure there would be failure to the Nth degree, and then some. However, when a motor goes bad under such circumstances, a pilot doesn't live long enough to do any worrying about what was left of this life.

Added to the total lack of flying visibility, there was a heavy gloom through all that sky wherein Rutter climbed. That's very unusual; and the condition told Rutter that the canopy overhead must be plenty thick, and bad, when the bright western sun couldn't shoot the least bit of ray into his troubled sphere of limited sky. Five thousand feet off the ground, and no break had showed to Rutter's advantage. Ten thousand feet —and it was really fifteen thousand above sea level—and not a bit better. Above that, knowing not how far above that you must go, the thing takes worlds of courage; and Rutter went right along with the work that wrung his very soul.

But the ship, pawing for altitude, with the good Liberty motor moting for everything it had, wasn't going to get many more feet of ceiling. Even under the best conditions, that type of craft wasn't good for more than twenty thousand feet. Now, loaded with that back breaking snow and ice, the craft reached its absolute limit at a little better than the fifteen thousand foot mark, which, of course, was not more than ten thousand feet above Nevada's wild country.

The first hour of flight had passed when Rutter decided that this was the ceiling and that this ceiling wasn't going to do him the least bit of good. But that ceiling put Rutter above all possible danger of colliding with Nevada's mountain tops; this, of course, in the

event he had drifted more to the south than he had intended. So, hoping for the best and really expecting the worst, the wild man of the Western Division made up his mind to fly on his instruments and hold to the high, blind flying till something else happened. But as for making anything happen, that was beyond all hope of human control.

Watching the clock on his instrument board, Pilot Rutter saw the second hour pass into history. By then he was a pretty badly spent flyer. He was tired. His perspective and balance were all screwgee; and he hardly knew up from down. Time and again, taking a look at his tachometer, he discovered that instrument running wild, showing a motor speed reading that should have burned the bearing babbitt out of the engine. He'd correct that, pulling up the ship's nose till the wires and struts quit that hellish whistling, and the tachometer's reading fell to normal. But again, half a minute later, the same tachometer would show a hand that pointed to five or six hundred revs per minute. Stalling speed! Danger ahead! And Rutter must fight that too, dip his nose and slap full gun to his motor.

A man can't carry on under such conditions. Somebody, a good authority too, has said that no pilot can fly for more than fifteen minutes without the aid of outside—earthly or astral—markers. He, that authority, was more or less correct. However, he had made no allowances for the exception. Those exceptions have occurred, even before this trip wherein Rutter was trying to uphold a pal. And maybe that's why Rutter was able to go so far beyond the point where those who know claim that a man must break. Must go haywire. Must toss in the towel, take the long spin, and crash. Glad to end such torture.

There's no way of knowing just how far Rutter could have carried this impossible piece of air work, for something happened shortly before the third hour had payed out. Rutter's oil pressure fell off. That is, his instrument board gage showed an indicator hand that was fast falling toward O. It meant one or more of three things. The gage, a grief giving device, might be going haywire. If that was all that was wrong, not so bad. But a man has no way to discover that it is merely a faulty indicator. The other two things that might be causing the reading to fall toward O were either a broken oil line or a shortage of oil. Either might prove fatal. The man who was so cut off from the world had only once choice, the choice that a regular pilot must take and take right away quick—go down while the going is still good. Start down while the power unit is still furnishing that all important propeller thrust. Next minute, if the decision should be delayed, might be too late and just too bad.

There's no way of putting on paper, and into this book, what Rutter then put into work. You can't draw that picture with words. It is out of the question to depict that ship, nose down and wires singing, boring steadily toward the ground. You can't compare the job with anything that goes on where any other line of dangerous work is in progress. An airman's sphere is his world apart; and unless you too have faced some part of his hell, then you must labor hard to get his reactions. Of course, it isn't so hard to savvy his suspense.

Goggles are of no use against sleet and snow; and they had been discarded long ago. So Rutter, hanging his head out beyond a windshield that was also frosted and fogged beyond use, must face the storm and trust to chance that his eyes would be partly on the job when the last awful seconds of setdown should call upon him for all that he had in the line of airmanship.

This, needless to say, was not the first time that Rutter had hung the old head overside and waited for the plane to reach some mountain side or what have you. More than a few mail planes had been draped in strange places by this

wild man. However, this was just about the toughest spot that the man had ever filled; and, deep in his flying heart, was the hunch that this was to be his last personal appearance in this particular difficult act. And Miller, the big stiff, would never know what a swell die Rutter had made of the thing.

Rutter's altimeter hand had fallen to zero. Zero, the way he kept it set, was Reno, not sea level. With the thing at zero, a ship might still have a few hundred feet of safety, for the altimeter in use at this time wasn't so accurate, to say the least. But when the hand reached the bottom pin, like that, it was just about time for Rutter to start lifting the nose back to level. Time to take that ship into his lap, and start feeling for the ground. He did that thing, and throttled low. Throttled till he knew his bus was stalling and staggering. It must have been mushing and sinking too, for little sound of whistling struts and wires came to Rutter's ears. But, now and then, the fumes of his motor's exhaust gases eddied into his pit; and when that happens a pilot has very little of headway and flying speed left. But, each time that happened, Rutter shot more power to his craft, regained control, then stalled and staggered some more.

Killing, that line of work. Heart breaking and nerve pulling too. It sort of drives a pilot batty, and makes him wonder if the job is really worth all the grief that trails with it.

Then the ground came up. Rutter's right lower wing took a passing bite out of a treetop. Rutter sensed, more than felt, the slight swishing jar that came with the contact. He looked that way and saw a small bunch of spruce boughs tangled in the angle where his front outer landing wire met the front strut's lower fitting.

He throttled still lower, goosed his throttle to retain some feel of control, and eased the stick back into his belly till the nose pointed high into the storm. No use talking, that mail ship was just coasting along on its tailskid; and why, oh why, didn't that tailskid reach bottom? Why didn't it get back to earth and put a stop to the endless suspense?

Other trees had flashed past Rutter in the last few crowded seconds. And here and there a peek at the ground came through the blinding storm. But there was nothing that a man could learn for sure. He guessed that the country was fairly open, more or less free of trees. Perhaps, with luck, he'd be able to put that ship down and roll to a stop before smacking something too hard.

The wheels struck, and bounced. Rutter held everything.

He goosed power to his motor and made sure that the rolling, bouncing setdown would be completed with as much rudder-control as possible. Then there was one whale of a buck and a bounce, the prop whirred, and the bus sat down—with the landing gear struts popping up through the floor boards of his cockpit. Not bad at all.

With great good luck the sharply broken wooden struts had missed Rutter. Many's the time, in like setdowns, that such struts had proved fatal. Rutter was unhurt. However, he was more or less snow blind. And this matter of finding everything so quiet, all of a sudden, was enough to knock a keyed up *hombre* more or less off balance.

Now that he was down, and under the storm, Rutter could see for some distance. He was in a level clearing; and there was just a chance that he had arrived at or near the place of his intended destination—the upper Owens Valley country. Still, this place might be a mountain ridge shelf, far from any town or railroad. Which, if true, would be not so good from Rutter's point of view.

After a few quiet minutes of readjustment, Rutter began to unravel himself from that cramped, cold seat. He climbed out and tried the snow. There was snow upon snow crust; all, put to-

gether and added up from the ground, made it pretty thick. But the present deposit of soft snow was not so thick that Rutter couldn't make his way through at will. The storm, though, was still a slashing, cold affair; so the future was a thing that must be faced. Rutter wasn't out of the woods yet. Not by a long shot.

TWENTY-FOUR hours went by without word from Pilot Rutter. Miller, sticking pretty close to the San Francisco office, became more or less a thorn in the super's side. The super, of course, was very anxious to start a search. Strange as it may seem, the other Reno and San Francisco pilots, including Miller, insisted upon delaying that search. And the super, feeling guilty, no doubt, couldn't quite get their point of view. Miller, however, pointed out that they, the pilots, were the men who must rise and fly—and not the super—when the aerial hunt should start. And any search on that Western Division was bound to be a tough piece of air work. The super marked time.

Miller, needless to say, had taken care of the details put in his hands by the Reno field manager's long and costly telephone communication. Yes, he'd been working on his flying mates, also via long distance phone. But knowing that the storm was so general, Miller and ilk had certain misgivings about delaying the start. Maybe the nut was dying in his crash.

When forty-eight hours passed without word from the wild man, Pilot Miller began to put in calls for several of certain points in the Owens Valley country. Answers to those calls gave Miller nothing in the line of useful information. The storm, the forest rangers said, was pretty heavy in the upper reaches of the valley. One of their men had slept in that hunting shack last night; and there was no sign of a mail plane or of Rutter in that neck of the woods.

With that information under his hat, Miller checked back to Reno and points east. Elko and Salt Lake City. Nothing had been heard of Rutter. This was a good time to start doing things. So thinking, Pilot Miller drove out to the Bay City field, intending to "give" the super permission to start the search.

"Where's his Nibs?" Miller asked, arriving at the mail field office. It was only 9 A.M. but Miller knew the super's early habits.

"You mean the super?" the field manager asked.

"None other," Miller made known. "I want to see Jingle Bells. Any word from Rutter since last I was out here?"

"Nothing new on Rutter," the field manager made known. "But as for the super, you no can see, Miller. He's gone. The super and Page hopped off half an hour ago. They're out to find Rutter. Kind of beat you to it, eh?"

"You kidding me? Where are they going to start this hunt?"

"North end of Owens Valley, I think. They studied that there map for five or ten minutes, and they mentioned Owens Valley. Say, in your opinion, ain't they all wet? How come Rutter to get away down there, eh? Not a chance. What's wrong with you, feller? Here, sit down. Your jaw's hanging wide open, and you're glassy eyed. Did you think you saw the ghost of a bird you owed ten bucks, or something? Want water?"

Pilot Miller busied himself with the lighting of a cigaret, and made no answer for awhile. Then, noticing that it was within half an hour of departure time for the San Francisco-Reno hop, Miller asked—

"Who's going to fly the Reno run, with Page gone out looking for big game in Owens Valley?"

"Big game in Owens Valley?" the field manager questioned, and repeated. "Say, guy, when did you and the super start going to different schools together? That's just what I heard him say to Page—big game in Owens Valley. The super kind of laughed and kidded about

that crack. Let me in on this. Are you birds looking for Rutter or are you out for a midwinter hunting trip? As for the Reno hop, the super told me to wash that out. I'll turn back the mail when they bring it out from the P. O."

"You won't have to," Pilot Miller said. "I'll do Page's hop this morning. Then I'll start my search for Rutter out of Reno."

"That's all jake with me," the field manager agreed. "You see, Miller, between you and me, I kind of balled up the detail. The super told me to telephone the P. O. and have them ship the Reno mail by railroad. But I was busy at the time, and I forgot to make the call. I've been worrying about it. There'd be a yell made if they had to run out here, then take it back to the P.O. That's happened too many times. Yep, this pulls me out of a hole. I'll go out now and have them push a ship to the line and start warming the motor. Hope you find Rutter."

"You and me both," Miller said, as he started climbing into his flying togs. "If any of the gang east of here, Reno or Elko, call in and want to know where I am, you say that the hunt is on. Tell them to get up and start pushing clouds too."

Twenty minutes later the mail matter came out from the downtown San Francisco post office. Three or four minutes after that, Miller put power to his ship, climbed out of that field, and turned northeastward for Reno—and for whatever might be happening where there seemed to be "big game in Owens Valley". Miller, to say the least, was troubled. Worse than that, he was more or less stopped. In short order, one hour and twenty-five minutes, he knocked down the one hundred and eighty miles that stand between S.F. and Reno. And the field manager was out on the deadline waiting for him.

Pilot Miller, taking the field manager aside, asked—

"Page and Jingle Bells been in here?"

"In and out," the field manager told Miller. "They took on a full tank of gas, then hopped out and east. Say, what do you make of this? Something's all wrong when you see a guy like Jingle Bells going up to the sky in ships, and on a day like this. Must be plenty cold in the air, isn't it?"

Pilot Miller didn't even answer the last question. He had a few questions of his own that had to be asked, and answered, if that were possible.

"Did Page or the super say where they were going, looking for Rutter?" he asked the field manager.

"Not to me," the latter answered. "Just said they were on the hunt, that's all. Why do you ask?"

"Well," Miller told him, "something's leaked. Jingle Bells and Page are on their way down to Owens Valley this very minute."

"The devil you tell!" mused the Reno field manager. "How come you know that?"

"Got it from the S.F. office. They studied the valley map before pulling out. Now, look here, have you mentioned Rutter's plans to anybody? Said anything at all to the gang around here?"

"What a large sized fool you must think I am!" the field manager wailed. "I'm looking for another job right now if anything has leaked, Miller. For a fact, I guess I'll start straightening out the office and get everything set for a move."

"Hold everything," Miller warned. "Have the gang service my ship. I'm going out now to do a little searching too. Listen, I won't go directly to Owens Valley. That would look too raw. Anyway, there's hardly a chance that Rutter is in that neck of the woods. I'm going to move farther east and take a look at the country around Austin and Eureka. Maybe he made a try for those valleys. Then on my next hop, just to make things look right, I'll work down toward Owens. And while I'm gone, you use your head and see what you can dig up."

MILLER made that hunt to the east. At four in the afternoon, after a full four-hours' flight, he returned to the field. The manager had news.

"No," the latter told Miller, "Page and the super didn't come back. You were right, they're in Owens Valley. It's this way, Jack Seebling hopped a Western Transportation Company ship up here from L.A. today. He came by way of Mojave and Bishop, right up over Owens Valley. He spotted this mail ship just south of Mono Lake, thought it might be Rutter, and flew low for a look.

"Jack says there isn't very much snow in there, and when he jazzed low over the plane he could see that it was O.K. Then, near a shack, there were two guys; and they gave him a wave. He knew it wasn't Rutter. But Jack gave me a ring when he landed in Reno. He thought that maybe one of the searching planes was down with motor trouble. I told him we'd go down and take a look. Another thing, Seebling says we don't have to hurry a bit getting to those birds because they had a fire in the shack. He could see the smoke."

"I guess we're both looking for a job," Pilot Miller said. "But, on the other hand, Rutter's got to be found. Tell you what, I've got about another hour of daylight. If there's a ship ready, I'll hop it, and drift down into that neck of the woods for a look. I won't go too near. We can't waste these hours though. It will help the cause if they see or hear my motor down in that neck of the woods."

There was another ship all set to go, so Miller took it. The field manager, riding the open mailpit, went along with him. It was dark, however, when they passed over Mono Lake and the upper end of Owens Valley. Nevertheless, anybody down there could hear the bark of their motor, so a seed of doubt might have been sown in the mind of Jingle Bells. Surely a pilot wouldn't be flying in that black sky unless he really believed that another airman was truly lost.

Miller had little or no idea of locating anything in that piece of country as he flew over in the dark. But just before passing north of the lake he spotted a fire burning off to the east, about two miles inland from the water. That, Miller knew, was in rolling country. His first impulse was to turn back. But Mono Lake is all of a hundred and fifteen miles from Reno. The night was pretty black, and cold, so Miller decided to cut for home. That fire down there, in the open, would keep till morning. But he pointed out the spot to the field manager, and at the same time made a mental note of the exact location.

"You know," Miller said, when they landed an hour later, "I'm sorry now that we didn't swing back and take a peek at that fire east of Mono. There's places in there a man might put a ship down. And what's more, I don't know why anybody should be camping in the open there unless they had to. But she'll keep till morning. If it's the wild man, well he's been out, like that, more than a few times. Now let's get organized. How early can I get a ship in the morning?"

"Well," the field manager said, "I'll look up a few of the macs as soon as I get into Reno. There'll be an early starting crew on the job at daybreak. That's early enough, eh?"

Miller and the field manager drove into Reno for the night.

The early starting crew was out in the snow before daylight next morning. And they had a ship on the line when Miller came out from Reno. At 6:15, which was really before the sun had made the grade, Miller was on the wing. And he was flying alone this hop. Into the southeast, bee-line for Mono Lake, his ship bored its hurrying nose.

There was a thin riser of smoke coming up from the spot which Miller had fixed in his mind last night. There was a man standing with his back to the gay

fire from which that thin riser of smoke was waving; and the lone fire warmer was waving too. It was Rutter. His plane, still all in one piece, was about a hundred yards from where he'd made camp.

Miller, flying with the stick between his knees, circled above Rutter's spot and jotted down a brief note. The brief note said:

> Jingle Bells and Page are back in our shack north of Casa Diablo Hot Springs. Some thing leaked. Stay where you are. I'm flying back there for them. Will bring them right along. —MILLER

Pilot Miller stuffed the note into his left glove. Then he once more took the ship in hand, dropped down to within a hundred feet of the ground, slapped full throttle to his motor, and laid that big mail ship over into a tight right *verage*. Then, while the craft was flying that tight, vertical *verage*, Miller dropped the heavy glove. A man like Miller gets good at dropping bombs. For a fact, Rutter had to reach quickly and pull the glove out of his fire.

Twenty minutes later, after flying a ridge of rough country, Miller shot his plane across the clearing that held Page's mail ship. The ship was still there. It seemed to be there for a stay too, for Page had pulled the covers over motor and cockpit. Miller was a bit sore about that, for a ship on the hunt should be hunting. But anyway, the super wasn't searching for Rutter. No, he was only out to see what he could see. No use talking, something had leaked. But the showdown was close at hand now.

As Miller flew downwind and made his turn, he saw Page and the super come to the threshold of the small shack. They stood there watching Miller's incoming plane. Miller put down to a landing, and killed his power when his bus was within a few hundred feet of Page's ship. Then, with all the acting he could put on, Miller hurried to the shack, calling:

"I located him! I found Rutter! He's O.K."

"That's fine," the super said, without the least show of unmanly excitement. "Where is he, Miller?"

"Back east of Mono. About twenty-five miles from here," Miller told Jingle Bells. "He seems to be O.K, and has a fire."

"Gosh," said the super, "he must have got lost, Miller."

Miller had all he could do to avoid blowing off, right then and there. It was a struggle, but he managed to keep his shirt on. He bit down hard on the old upper lip, and said:

"Rutter can't fly out of the flat he's in. It's wheel deep in snow. So we can't fly in, either. I dropped him a note saying I'd be back. I expected to get help from Casa Diablo Hot Springs, but now that I've run on to you people, well, we can handle it."

"Good," the super mused. "Any suggestions, Miller?"

"Yes," Pilot Miller said. "It's only a few miles back to the Hot Springs. We might get a light car there. If we can, we can run north here as far as Mono Mills. Maybe farther. Anyway, that will put us within a dozen miles of Rutter. He's over the ridge, so we'll have to make part of the distance on foot. Guess we can do it."

"Let's get started," Jingle Bells suggested. "Don't want our man Rutter to be lost, you know. That would never do. No, sir."

Miller, the hog wild guy, didn't explode, but, were you to ask him, chances are that he couldn't tell you why he didn't. Why take all this cheap guff from the super? The game was just about played, anyway. Sooner or later, and not much later, the popoff must come.

All three hiked back to Casa Diablo Hot Springs. They were lucky in getting the loan of a light truck there. Luckier still, they were fortunate enough to secure snowshoes, and a guide. The guide said that he knew just about

where Rutter must be. Very few people went over into that neck of the woods, for most of that country was full of hard going and very little worthwhile game. But there was one level spot where a good pilot might make a landing. Rutter must be on that table.

Driving roads that he knew very well, the guide managed to push the light truck as far as Mono Mills, four or five miles from the lake. Leaving the truck there, they took out along the logging railroad that snakes its way up to the southeastern elge of the lake.

Reaching the lake shore, they turned more to the east; and there was where the guide came into his own. It was the right place for a man who really knew; and this snowshoeing *hombre* was the man.

It was noon by then; and the midday heat of California wasn't helping that snow at all. Just making it soft, deep and heavy. Even Miller was sorry that Rutter had chosen this spot in which to go lost. Miller, of course, now figured that Rutter had merely changed his mind about the place of choosing, giving up the old idea for some queer reason all his own. Well, she'd been a pretty costly party. Far better had Rutter flown his hop, delivered the mail in S.F, and left Miller to his own fate. So thought Miller more and more as the hours passed. But Rutter had done his best, made his try, and if this was the end of two air mail careers, those two careers had sure been *some* careers, seen much action, and brought good results—to air. They might chuck pilots overboard, but they'd never be able to erase the past. It's the only thing that they can't take away from a man.

ONE o'clock found them still tramping snow, slipping and falling, stumbling and grumbling, as is the way of men who know little or nothing of picking up big, wide snowshoes and putting 'em down. That, brothers, is work, all work!

At two o'clock the guide said that it wasn't far now. Miller agreed, saying that it *couldn't* be far now. And it wasn't, for at 2:20 they sighted Rutter's ship, and the smoke of Rutter's fire.

As they came up, the three air mail men noticed that Rutter was comfortably seated atop a pile of five or six regulation U.S. mail sacks. He had them near the fire and under a motor tarpaulin.

"Mail sacks, Rutter?" Jingle Bells questioned.

"Nothing else but," Pilot Rutter agreed. "And these are not just common, run o' post office, everyday mail sacks, gentlemen. It's not my own Reno-S.F. cargo. That's still in the ship's pit." Rutter jerked a thumb toward the ship. Rutter—the lowdown story teller.

"Let's not kid ourselves," the super said. "There never was any Reno-S.F. mail matter in that ship. It, Rutter, was left at Reno, by mistake, let's say. Mistakes, you know, will happen in the best of well regulated families. Now," the super pressed, getting down to cases, "just what mail matter is this, Rutter?"

"This, Super," Rutter told them, "goes back to before your time with air mail. This is the most valuable cargo of air mail ever loaded aboard a plane. Maybe you've heard of the case. The strange and complete disappearance of Air Mail Pilot Danny Arley, with a big load of registered mail. That was just a year ago next month. There was a big storm between the Sierras and Salt Lake, all the way. But Danny Arley took off from Elko for Reno; and here he is. I found his ship half a mile up the cañon. It's at the bottom of a ravine, with a solid canopy of big pines over it. No wonder it was never found from the air. Hell, men, you could hardly see it from the tops of the trees that cover it. Miller, it's a lesson never to pile up in a place like that. Wait till you see it."

"And how about Danny?" Miller asked.

"He's still there, in the cockpit," Rut-

ter told them. "That is, his boots and some rags are still there. It was a landing gear strut that got him, I think. Right through his head, in the crash. The strut—" Rutter was explaining this to the super, who might not fully comprehend the law of crash—"you see, came right up through the floor boards. Just history repeating itself, and another pilot gone. I didn't stick around to give Danny much of a looking over. But just to be doing something, just to keep warm, I lugged the sacks all the way down here.

"These sacks, Super, as you'll recall so well, came danged close to busting the whole Western Division wide open when it happened. Nobody, not even you, would believe that a pilot could be so careless as to allow any storm to drive him down while carrying registered mail. The whole division was loused up with Secret Service and postal inspectors for months. Hell's bells! There never was a crook in an air mail cockpit. We're dumb, but on the level. Guess we'd best be moving. Follow me."

The snow up toward the small box cañon in which Pilot Danny Arley had made his rendezvous with death was pretty deep. Walking ahead, Rutter explained that he had been out looking for fresh meat, the day after the storm, when he came upon the wreck. Then, in short order, the four air mail men and the guide were on the scene.

The ship had trimmed all four wings from its fuselage while crashing through the trees. The motor end was pretty well in the ground. The mail pit and the pilot's pit were on the ground, and now partly covered by the drift of this Winter's storms.

Steeling themselves to a job that few airmen welcome, all hands fell to the task of taking Danny Arley's remains from that pit. There was the usual motor tarpaulin under the cushion of the seat; and in this they placed all that was mortal of that game, storm facing pilot. The super, just as a duty, went through what was left of the clothing, removing the few personal belongings.

"That," he said, "just about cleans me up. Now I can go home to the wife and kids. Rutter, and you, Miller, will you step over here till I have a few words with you?"

Rutter and Miller, wondering at the opening of Jingle Bells' remarks—"Now I can go home to the wife—" followed the super, till they were beyond earshot of Page and the guide.

"Everything's quits, washed up, between old Jingle Bells and you two men," the super said, and laughed a bit. "Rutter, I'm the last one of those inspectors who loused up your Western Division. Now I can go back East. Now, to come all the way, you two men wonder how come I knew about the shack in the Owens Valley country. Just a matter of wire tapping. All wires and telephone calls, in and out of Reno and Elko, small towns and easy to handle, have been tapped and checked. And this for the whole eleven months past. A big job. However, when I hopped down to Owens Valley I went with the idea of checking up on you men strictly as pilots. I never guessed, nor did you, that this would be the end.

"I'm glad I came along. And I'm also glad that you two are the kind of men who stand right up on your hind legs and paw out when air mail matters seem all wrong to you. Of course, this ends my connection with air mail, but I'm going to mention your names in and about Washington when I get back. Shake. I'm glad to know you both. And don't be too hard on old Jingle Bells. Lord, what a name for a guy like me who prides himself upon being a man's man. Wait till I tell my chief what kind of fop he sent way out West where men should be men."

The RED CEDAR

By HAL GOULD

I HAD STOPPED to chat with Skulthka, the old Hydah carver and canoe builder. He sat in the sunshine before the door of his dwelling, industriously chipping away with his little hand adz at a broad slab of red cedar. In reply to a question he said:

"You ask me, *keh*—my nephew—why the Hydah people hold Tsu, the red cedar, in such high esteem. Tsu is a good wood, *keh*. It is light; it is durable; also it is easy to work. That is why the Hydah people used it to make all things.

"In the old days, before the Iron People—white men—brought iron from which good tools might be made, only of stone and copper were tools made; and of bone and shell.

"When, in the old days, men would fell a tree or make a canoe, they must first char the wood with fire, scraping away the char and renewing the fire again and again. For this Tsu was the best, the easiest worked. Now that we have the Iron People's tools it is still the best. That is why the Hydahs make all things of Tsu the Red Cedar."

It is figuratively said that the coconut palm yields all the necessities of life to the South Sea Islander; and that the bamboo can completely supply the needs of the dwellers along the Asiatic shore; but it is doubtful if either palm or bamboo is put to more universal use than was the red cedar by the aborigines of the North Pacific Coast.

Light, free riving, easily cut and worked, durable, the list of its uses was long and varied.

The huge purline beams, often two feet in diameter and fifty feet long, which supported the roof in their great communal houses, were each hewn from a single stick of red cedar; and the light arrows used for water fowl shooting were wrought from the same material.

In this region of long continuing rains and heavy snows a superior roof covering was needed. Broad sheets of cedar bark, laid layer upon layer, fulfilled this need admirably. The fibrous inner portions of the same bark, pounded and rubbed to a downy fluff, softly cushioned the trough-like cradle board within which the infant Hydah was rigidly bound, for safety and convenience, during the early months of his life.

This inner bark of the cedar, capable of being stripped into long, tough ribbons, was about the only textile material available to the Hydahs. It was eagerly collected wherever clear straight growing young trees were found.

This no doubt accounts in a large measure for the defectiveness of so many of the mature cedars. When the side of a tree most free of limbs has been stripped of its bark to a height of thirty or forty feet, that side, naturally, dies and decays. The opposite side, continuing to grow, eventually encircles this dead wood, but the result is a lopsided trunk, knotty and rotten at the heart.

The gathering of this material was done in the Spring and early Summer, when the sap was flowing and the bark lay free and easily peeled from the soft substance of the newly forming annual growth ring between it and the old wood.

There is scarcely a spot on the islands

so distant and isolated that it does not show the scars of the peeling knife.

Freed of its rough outer portion and skilfully shredded into even strips, of the thickness of heavy manila paper, this inner bark was wrought into a multitude of useful articles. Mats of various sizes, so closely woven that they would shed water like a tarpaulin; baskets and bags and containers of many sorts; cordage, both twisted and braided—the former often as even and smooth as machine laid manila rope and of excellent strength and durability.

Especially fine and lightweight mats supplied sails for the canoes, and clothing of all qualities, from heavy raincapes to almost linen-fine undergarments were made of the same universally useful material.

Combined with the long hair of the mountain goat, cedar bark was woven into the elaborately decorated and highly prized "Chilkat blanket."

Broad sheets of the bark from larger trees, removed with great care to avoid splitting or breaking, were flattened and stiffened with light strips of wood bound across at intervals. These, trimmed to a size of two or three feet in width by five or six in length, furnished excellent cargo covers for the canoe and roofing for temporary camps.

The wood itself was applied to almost every conceivable purpose. From it the Hydah built his canoes, no doubt one of the most perfect of primitive craft. From it he carved his towering totem poles, both the elaborate honorary and memorial columns and the simpler mortuary monuments. It furnished the complete material for his dwelling and for most of its furnishings. Paddles he fashioned from the heavier, more springy wood of its cousin, the yellow cedar—Sa-beth-lan (the Alaska or Nootka cedar), and for his bows and lance shafts he used the rare yew wood—Thla-heát, but Tsu, the red cedar, remained his mainstay. The abundant spruce and hemlock, now the principal materials of the white man, he used rarely or never.

"What do you make now?" I asked the old man.

"I make a box," he replied. "An old fashioned cedar box. The old boxes are good for keeping things. True it requires time and labor. Much labor and skill. I am skilful.

"How large a box do I make? I will show you, *keh.* The height will be the same as the width of this board I have hewn; very flat and straight I have hewn it, and of an even thickness equal to the width of my thumb. Three spans wide it is; therefore three spans will be the height of the box.

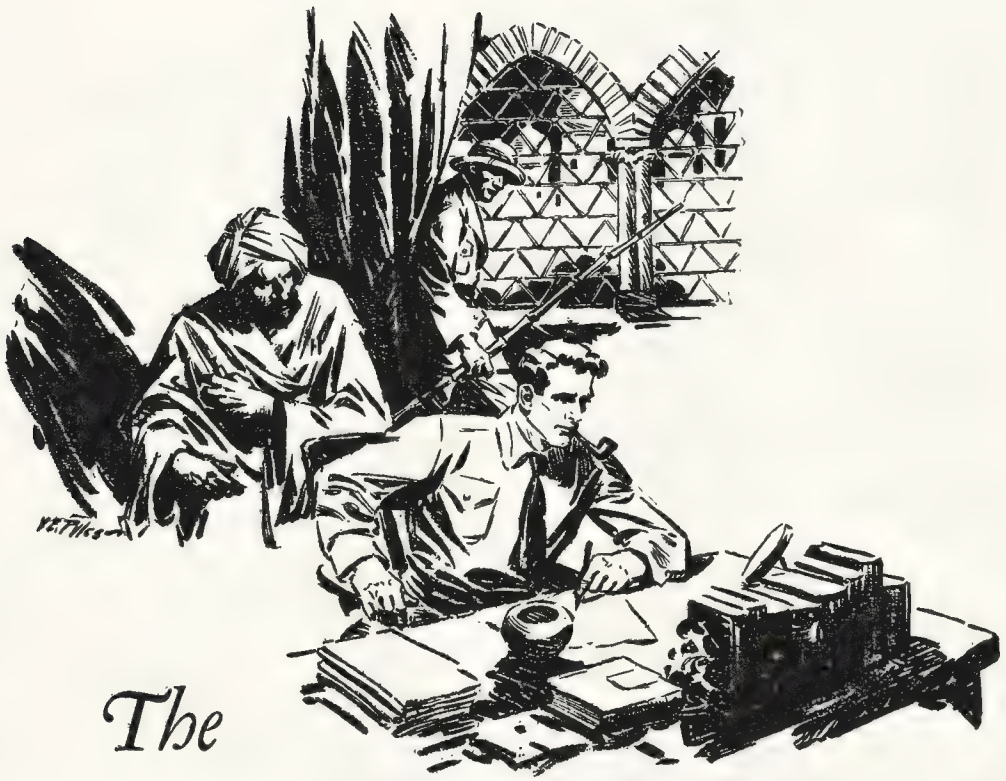
"Ten spans long is the board. See, I will measure it and at each two spans and a half I will make a mark. At these three marks will be the corners of the box, and where the ends join will be the other corner. Two spans and a half a span will be the sides of the box.

"At the places I have marked I will cut deeply across the inside of the board thus (a V-shaped scarf). Not entirely through the board will I cut. Wood of half the thickness of my finger I will leave on the outside. When these cuts are finished I will make all very soft with oil and much hot water so that the thin wood I have left on the outside will stretch when I bend it.

"Yes, it is difficult, but if the wood be well softened and skilfully handled it will stretch and not break. I am skilful. The two ends I will join thus with notches, dove tails, so they will fit tightly. If they should leak a little then I will bore a small hole along the joint that leaks and drive plug into it—a stopwater plug. Thus will it be tight. When I have fitted a bottom and a lid then will it be finished.

"When will it be finished? Perhaps this moon; perhaps next moon. It matters not. There is no hurry. Why do white men always hurry, saying, 'When will this be finished; when will that be finished?'

"Does not death overtake them just the same, *keh?*"



The Governor's Secretary

A Story of Burma

By S. B. H. HURST

THE big Sikh policeman, on guard at the governor's private entrance to the government building in Rangoon, Burma, saluted and stood stiff as a ramrod as Lord Cameron, the governor, and his friend, Horace Sinnat of the secret service, entered.

"It's nice to see you back in the capital again, Bugs," the governor was saying. "Breaks the monotony." He grinned. "It's all routine here, as you know—none of that varied excitement, danger and crime you live with when away."

"I can stand a rest," replied Bugs. "Yes, I'd like, for a change, a bit of that 'Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin', to quote that utopian hymn we had to sing Sunday nights at school."

His Lordship laughed. Then he opened the door of his private office and exclaimed:

"The deuce! Look, Bugs—the abstemious, excellent, hard working, always on time Lal Mukergee, my estimable secretary, has fallen asleep at his desk. At nine in the morning!"

Bugs stepped in ahead of the gov-

ernor. The big *babu* had slumped forward in his chair, and his arms and face were resting on the desk. Bugs stepped forward quickly. Behind him the governor was laughing good naturedly. Bugs' hands and eyes made a swift examination. Then he turned and spoke gravely.

"Asleep," he said. "Yes—but he will never waken again. He is dead, old man."

"Dead! Good Lord, are you sure?" cried Cameron, bending over the body.

"Positive," said Bugs gravely.

Cameron rushed to the door and shouted to a passing clerk—

"Get Doctor Thompson—quickly!"

The clerk ran to get the government physician, and Cameron turned back to Bugs.

"The poor, faithful fellow." He was deeply shocked. "I knew, of course, that he had heart trouble—slow heart."

"Bradycardia," said Bugs.

"That's it. And the poor chap must have had a sudden attack, and died."

The *babu* was clothed in white linen. His legs and arms were bare. On the right arm Bugs was examining a recent hypodermic puncture.

"Exactly," said the governor. "He took injections to stimulate his heart."

Bugs nodded.

"Nothing a doctor can do," he said. "But here is Thompson now."

The governor turned to greet the physician. Suddenly Bugs tensed. From the lightly clenched right hand of the dead man a piece of paper protruded. Probably nothing more than a note of the business he was engaged upon when death took him, but Bugs did not overlook anything. The paper was in his pocket when the physician reached the body.

"Nothing to do, of course," said the doctor. "Natural causes. Don't think an inquest is needed. I have treated him, well as I could, for four years. Gave him the stuff to use for stimulant. A high caste Hindu. No sense stirring up trouble with his family by suggesting a post-mortem—which would show no more than I know."

"Very well, Doctor," said the governor.

"A decent chap," went on the physician. "Oh, well, we all end one way or another. His will be the burning *ghat*."

Cameron turned away. The sight of death always affected him. Bugs took his arm.

"Indulge my queer intuition as always, will you? As soon as they get the body out of here, give me the key and leave me alone. You won't feel like working here today, anyway."

Cameron, who considered his friend's intuitions simply as super-mental processes, nodded.

And presently Bugs sat alone at the secretary's desk.

"I said intuition," he murmured, "but when a man in my business finds a cryptogram in the hand of a dead man it isn't so much intuition as suspicion."

He examined carefully the drawers of the dead *babu's* desk, and found nothing except papers having to do with his work as Cameron's secretary.

"And there was nothing in his pockets, because a *babu* has no pockets when in native dress," Bugs thought. "Nothing but this—in his hand."

An ordinary piece of notepaper, with no distinguishing marks. On it—

YWGRNRIDCOLTNEEAITAFEORNREVTLIEDHLSNPRRONY
SYIWDHLIBEUSYAOTOSERRU

"Promises to be interesting, anyway," thought Bugs. "I will have a talk with Cameron."

"Tell me something," he said, when he obtained the interview, "about Lal Mukergee. Maybe I am just barking up a tree, but I don't feel that way. What do you know about your late secretary—his habits, associates, amusements?"

"Not a great deal." His Lordship wrinkled his forehead. "Why this interest, Bugs? Thompson said it was natural death."

"Maybe Thompson is right. But when

I find a thing like this in a dead man's hand, I always get curious," drawled Bugs.

And he showed the cryptogram to the governor.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Cameron. "What the devil does that mean?"

"I don't know—yet," answered Bugs. "But you must admit that it's worth looking into."

"Certainly. You are right," said Cameron. "Are you, then, suggesting a post-mortem—in spite of Thompson's opinion?"

"That can wait an hour or two," answered Bugs. "I want to know what you know about Lal Mukergee."

"Well, he was a good man. Came from up Decca way. Quiet. Close with money, I think, and also lent it—at high rates of interest. Married, of course. Two boys—eldest ten years old. Only amusement I have heard of was that he was considered a first rate chess player."

"Thanks," said Bugs. "Return to your labors, me Lud—I am going out."

IT WAS a very hot morning. Bugs left the building and walked down the street to the office of a friend, Dr. Bates. Inside, he said to the practitioner—

"This bradycardia trouble—is there any drug which would cause death quickly, and have the death look as if it were caused by bradycardia?"

"Aconitine would," replied Bates. "One of the most deadly of poisons."

"Hump," Bugs muttered. "Would a post-mortem show that death was due to aconitine?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Not specifically," he answered. "Sometimes the stomach is reddened, and the blood, also. But there is no specific indication."

"Not enough to convict a man of murder, eh?"

"Oh, no."

"No use bothering with a post-mortem, then?"

"No. But what do you mean, Sinnat?"

"Just looking for information—as usual," replied Bugs. "Thanks, Bates."

He returned to the government building to keep a luncheon appointment with the governor.

"By the way," he asked, "your late secretary was so fat, and had such a poor heart, that I suppose he never quarreled with any one?"

"No—" Cameron spoke thoughtfully. "No, poor Lal did not seem like a fighter. But—no, it was nothing; just Thompson rowing him the other day. Bawling him out. I heard them in the office as I came along the passage. When I went in Thompson grinned, and said, 'I have just been cussing your man here, Governor. He won't follow my advice. Told him that if he didn't do exactly what I told him to do I would drop his case."

"That was all, eh?" said Bugs.

"Yes, and unimportant," said the governor. "But you wanted all the details I could give you."

"Certainly," agreed Bugs. "Thanks. Now let's forget the matter. No use spoiling what appetite we may have on a day like this."

"Very well," agreed the governor. "But, by the way, we will have to send poor Lal's portfolio to his family."

"Portfolio?" asked Bugs quietly.

"Yes, a briefcase. Old thing that he always brought to work with him and took home at night. Kept his private papers in it, I imagine. I told you he lent money on the side. And of course, being a high caste Hindu, he would not do business at his home."

"Of course not," said Bugs. "You keep strengthening my theory that your secretary was murdered. There is no portfolio in the office. There was none when we found him dead. I looked particularly for private papers. That portfolio, to which he clung closer than a brother, and which doubtless contained the records of his money lending transactions, is missing, Cameron. This cryptogram —" Bugs showed the governor the paper

he had found in Lal's hand— "was enough to start me on the hunt; and this missing portfolio proves that I was not mistaken in starting."

"Murdered!" the governor muttered.

"Know the names of any people he lent money to?" Bugs asked.

"But of course I don't—why ask?" said Cameron.

"I'm always asking questions," Bugs answered. "That he lent money was just the general report, eh?"

"Yes. I have heard, overheard men talk, you know. English clerks going along the halls. Joking one another. 'If you need money borrow from the boss's secretary. He only charges a thousand percent.' That's all I know. And now—Why, Bugs, the Lord only knows how many men in the office may be implicated by your discovery."

"The Lord knows," said Bugs gravely. "But I will find out."

After lunch Bugs went to see Dr. Thompson. He had three distinct reasons for believing the secretary had been murdered, and the most conclusive of the three was the one that had sent him to Bates with the question about aconitine.

"Doctor," Bugs began, "I am not satisfied that Lal Mukergee died from natural causes."

"What? Why?" exclaimed the doctor, apparently startled.

"You know he lent money, of course," said Bugs.

The doctor hesitated.

"Yes," he answered finally.

"And kept his business accounts—his lending affairs—in a portfolio he always carried around with him."

The doctor, obviously nervous, looked keenly at Bugs. "Well, yes, I did," he admitted.

Bugs, looking at the toe of his shoe, said slowly:

"You understand, of course, that it's my business to ask questions. I don't like to do it in this way, but I must. How much did you owe Lal Murkegee, Doctor?"

The question plainly agitated Thompson.

"Is—is this necessary, Bugs?" he managed to ask

"The amount is not so very important," answered Bugs, still looking at his shoe. "Although it was rather a large sum, eh?"

The doctor got hold of himself.

"WELL," he said, "it's no crime to borrow. Like many of us, I lost money in the stock market."

"The matter of my doubting that Lal Mukergee died naturally is not guessing, Doctor!" Bugs now looked straight at the physician. "Here is what it amounts to. The portfolio is missing—not a trace of it! Some one who apparently wished to destroy all Lal's financial records—some debtor, I think—stole the portfolio after Lal was dead."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the doctor.

"I do. But that is not the worst of it." Bugs, speaking slowly, continued to stare at the doctor. "The worst of it is that Lal was murdered!"

"Murdered, Sinnat? Why, what makes you say that? But you are mistaken. I saw the body myself—Lal Mukergee died of bradycardia."

"In a sense he did," said Bugs gravely. "That is, his heart, always slow, stopped beating. But the death was caused by a hypodermic injection of a certain drug. One of the most deadly of poisons. It was given to Lal by some one who understood drugs well. By some one who knew Lal had bradycardia and knew he took injections to stimulate his heart. This murderer was known intimately to Lal. So well did the secretary know him that the murderer was able to go into the governor's office, talk to Lal, and then thrust the needle into him. Yes, Thompson! Clever man, this murderer. He gave Lal a drug that caused Lal to die from what seemed like bradycardia. A drug which a post-mortem would not show had been given. A

large dose of aconitine!"

The doctor's agitation became uncontrollable. He walked up and down the office.

"Sinnat, just what do you mean?"

"Then the murderer stole the portfolio, and probably destroyed it, because he owed Lal a large sum which he could not pay," went on Bugs. "I think the murderer was a doctor—who else would know so much about drugs and Lal's condition?"

"Good Lord!" Thompson gripped Bugs' shoulder. "Sinnat, are you accusing me?"

"An ordinary detective would arrest you," said Bugs. "Arrest you at once, for you see, you lied to Lord Cameron the other day. When you and Lal had a row. You were not rowing about Lal's not taking his medicine or anything like that. You were rowing about money. Lal was dunning you. Yes, Thompson—sit down!—everything points to you."

The doctor sat down. He had had time to think. The first shock of Bugs' words had left him.

"You may be clever," he said. "But I am an innocent man, and you come in here and accuse me of murder."

"Something like that," said Bugs gently.

"Accuse me—" the doctor thought he saw the weakness of Bugs' theory. "Yes, because some one stole the portfolio, if it has been stolen, and because I owed Lal money, and had a row with him. You haven't the slightest proof that any one gave Lal a hypodermic injection, let alone aconitine. The hypo marks on Lal's arms were made by himself—taking medicine."

Bugs smiled tolerantly.

"A doctor gave me a hypo once," he said. "The doctor stuck the needle into the deltoid of my right arm." Bugs touched the back of his right upper arm. "But when a man takes an injection himself, he does not stick the needle into the back of his right arm, away up. It would be very difficult for a man to do this And Lal, feeling the need of a stimulant in a hurry, would not try to imitate a contortionist. Two things made me suspicious, Thompson. One I will not mention just now. The other was that a fresh hypo mark was on Lal's upper right arm, in the deltoid. While every other mark was on his left arm, with none in the deltoid! Lal was right handed, and *never* stuck the needle into his right arm—not a mark in the right arm but the fresh one I saw at once—the mark made by the needle of a hypodermic containing a lethal dose of aconitine, given by the murderer to simulate death from bradycardia, which, as the murderer knew, would leave no specific post-mortem proof! Better be careful what you say, Thompson, until a jury acquits you."

The doctor, ashen pale, broke down altogether.

"I didn't do it, Sinnat! For God's sake, believe me. I did not do it. Please don't arrest me. I—"

Bugs broke in.

"Who did do it then? Who else knew enough while having such an excellent motive for murder? Who stole the portfolio?"

"I don't know. I didn't do it."

The doctor was in front of Bugs, his hands clasped, imploring. He looked as if he were about to fall on his knees before the secret service man.

Bugs was thinking of the cryptogram in his pocket. Thompson was obviously bordering on hysteria. Was this due to financial worries, or to a guilty conscience? The evidence against him was merely circumstantial. More proof would be needed for a conviction. And where did the cryptogram come in? Was it in any way connected with Lal's death? That cryptogram would have to be solved.

"I won't arrest you just yet, Thompson," said Bugs. "Go ahead about your business. But don't try to leave Rangoon. If you do you will be arrested at once. Understand?"

Thompson made a great effort and mastered himself. The reprieve from

immediate arrest helped him.

"I understand, Sinnat," he said fairly quietly. "But believe me when I tell you I am innocent. Lord! Use all your skill, Sinnat, and catch the real murderer . . . Had I better see a lawyer?"

"Funny question to ask me," said Bugs. "Thompson, it is my boast that I never sent an innocent man to prison. If you are innocent that should comfort you—so don't get a lawyer, for two reasons. First, if you do you will be arrested. The other doesn't matter—to you."

"I'll trust to your skill, Sinnat. I am innocent. Won't you shake hands—make me feel better?"

"Certainly," said Bugs, touched by the appeal. "Now, say nothing about this—no need to take even a lawyer into your confidence until you have to, you know. And I give you my word that no other soul knows that I even suspect you. I won't even have you shadowed—you could never get out of Burma, you know. . . I must go now."

HE WENT to his room, told his servant to say he was out of the city if any one asked for him, ordered some strong tea, lighted his pipe and examined the cryptogram.

YWGRNRIDCOLTNEEAITAFEORNREVTLIEDHLSNPRRONY
SYIWDHLIBEUSYAOTOSERRU

From a safe he took a book with annotated margins containing every sort of cryptogram known to Bugs and the secret service of India. For two hours he concentrated on this book and on the cryptogram. There was no code in the book that pointed to a solution, and none of the usual methods of solving such things gave even a hint of the meaning. The velvet night came over Rangoon, and still Bugs struggled with the thing. The cooking fires of Rangoon scented the city.

Bugs looked at his watch.

"They will be taking Lal Mukergee to the burning *ghat* pretty soon," he thought. "How hot it is! Lord, I'm tired. This thing has me beaten." He paused. "Yes, good idea. I will rush out and offer condolences. I might get a clue—supposing Thompson innocent. Best thing to do. Give me a bit of a rest, so I can work on the cryptogram later." His servant stood in the doorway. "Sandwich and some whisky and soda," said Bugs. "Then phone for a government car, with a liveried driver."

Did the cryptogram have a meaning, or was it, after all, just a mere jumble of letters? After every failure to solve it this thought had come to Bugs. If it were a mere jumble the case became clearer—whether Thompson or some other was the murderer. For if the cryptogram contained a message which could be even remotely connected with the crime the affair became tremendously involved. For why would a debtor, intending murder, send any such message; and why any cryptogram at all? If the cryptogram could be connected with the murder, then it appeared that no debtor had committed it. Then why had the portfolio been stolen? And why should any one murder Lal unless the motive was borrowed money, an inability to pay, suit threatened—something along that line. Bugs shook his head; he could imagine no other motive.

The night was gorged with heat, for the rains were due, and the lazy stars looked like jewels insecurely sewed on velvet. Through the maze that is Rangoon the car went, for the most part slowly—it had to. No city in the world is so overpopulated with religious buildings, and none so strangely hodgepodged—with secular erections worthy of any setting jammed between grotesque homes and carved teak pavilions. And fully one half the people are immigrants from India—Hindus

Lal's home was in the better class quarter of these Hindus, and through this quarter the car had to crawl—what with narrow streets and processions and children, and noise of weddings and

deaths, and the halting of sacred cows, which, however, heeded the resonant horn of a government motor car in the hands of an ex-artillery driver who answered to the name of Horan.

Noises of weddings and deaths, and Bugs politely conveying to the only brother of Lal Mukergee the compliments and condolences of the governor of Burma.

"You are, then, I presume, the only male relative of the governor's late secretary?" said Bugs.

"Except, sir, for a dissolute cousin, a person of low character," the brother answered in English. "A trouble maker, and a borrower of money—when he could get it. My brother and he were students together in India. A person to argue. My brother only tolerated him these late years because he is such a fine chess player. As you know, my brother who is now dead, loved chess. I think it a stupid game. But six months ago my brother denied his cousin admittance to this, my brother's house—he even would not play chess with him. The fellow will be at the funeral, though, for, after all, he is a relative. But of course I shall treat him with contempt!"

"I see," said Bugs gravely.

He went back to his car. This cousin would have to be investigated. Bugs decided to attend the burning of Lal Mukergee. But first he would have to get out of European clothes. He would attend the funeral as a *babu*—a Hindu gentleman.

He got into the car. About that cryptogram? And then, meteor-like, out of the dark of old memories came the picture! He suddenly leaned forward.

"Step on it, Horan," he said as calmly as he could. "Step on it!"

Horan stepped on it.

Chess! How that ancient and noble game seemed to be woven in this case! Bugs was shivering with excitement. The old memory. Long ago, playing, the idea that the difficult Knight's Tour on the chessboard would make a wonderful secret code, a marvelous cryptogram. Intuition was burning. Bugs felt certain he was on the right track—*for there were sixty-four letters in the cryptogram!*

"Step on it, Horan!"

Horan did his best, but as he had no wish to become a modern Juggernaut he was compelled to go slowly at frequent intervals. Bugs seethed with impatience.

WHEN at last they reached Bugs' rooms, he dismissed the car for the night, and told his native servant he would not need him again. Then he attacked the cryptogram feverishly.

First, on a large piece of cardboard, he drew the sixty-four squares of a chess and checker board.

"Now, let's see," he murmured." The idea I had years ago was that the receiver of a code message in the Knight's Tour would first enter the letters of the message in the sixty-four squares of the chess board—beginning at the top and proceeding from left to right as if writing a note."

He took the cryptogram and entered the letters in the squares of his handmade chess board.

Y . W . G . R . N . R . I . D .
C . O . L . T . N . E . E . A .
I . T . A . F . E . O . R . N .
R . E . V . T . L . I . E . D .
H . L . S . N . P . R . R . O .
N . Y . S . Y . I . W . D . H .
L . I . B . E . U . S . Y . A .
O . T . O . S . E . R . R . U .

Then he took a knight and put the piece on the bottom left hand corner square on the O. He was trembling like a hunting dog as he did so.

"I'll soon see if I am on the right track," he muttered. "Make the first knight's move. Ah! Now the second—Good! The third! By the powers, I have it! Now for the whole thing!"

The whole thing was a very difficult piece of work, even to a chess player. Bugs had to spell out the message by

moving the knight on to every square on the board in such a way that the knight moved to every square once only —never touching any one square twice. The first three moves had showed him that he was on the right track, but the complete Knight's Tour took some time —and he was in a hurry. Spurred on by his knowledge of being on the right track, he kept at it—numbering every move he made on the sixty-four moves. These numbers he entered on another homemade chess board.

40	21	58	9	38	19	56	7
59	10	39	20	57	8	37	18
22	41	50	47	30	27	6	55
11	60	29	26	51	48	17	36
42	23	46	49	28	31	54	5
61	12	25	32	45	52	35	16
24	43	2	63	14	33	4	53
1	62	13	44	3	64	15	34

Every number corresponded to a letter and to a move of the knight. Bugs was calm now. The cryptogram had been solved. And it read:

OBEY ORDER OR YOUR HEART WILL STOP VERY SUDDENLY THIS IS FINAL WARNING CENTER

And with the solution of the cryptic meaning the problem of the death of Lal Mukergee became more involved than before. Bugs sat and stared at the thing, lighted his pipe and thought and puzzled.

"More light," he muttered, "as Plato said. I thought it was Thompson, but it cannot be. Thompson did not send that message. The cousin did not send it. Who and what is 'Center'? Very deep deep water here, I fear. There is far more to this than a mere murder by a debtor; far more. Unless I am greatly mistaken, Thompson is entirely innocent, and the crime touches things that lurk deep down, threatening the foundations of things. And the words 'final warning' indicate that poor old Lal has been receiving these things for months. But, now for the cousin. He is evidently a lead, though how much of a lead I can't guess!"

He put down his pipe and moved rapidly. Everything was systematized—a trunk or box containing the necessaries for a disguise but not for different disguises—one box to each outfit. He was so sunburned that he needed little stain. Ten minutes later he stood in his room, Bugs Sinnat, an Englishman, no longer. He was a Bengali *babu* in white linen, arms and legs bare.

He was wearing sandals, and his keen eyes were covered by heavy, tortoise shell spectacles. A large white umbrella completed the costume. In this guise he walked to the fire escape, down it and into the alley. A few minutes later he boarded a street car among a crowd of natives of various Indian provinces. And the car clanged its cumbersome way through the dense native quarter of Rangoon.

The line ended some hundred yards beyond the house of Lal Mukergee. Bugs got out. Bare land sparsely populated by huts of poor people. To the right, toward the river, a road across this land, made by the tread of innumerable bare feet. Darkness and a few stars, and a glare where the road ended—the burning *ghat*. And two loud processions of mourners wending toward it.

Bugs walked fast, and caught up with the leading procession. It was the more pretentious of the two—Lal had been a man of some importance, and his was a high caste. It was a weird scene, and it became more so. For the rains were about to break, and the clouds were drifting across the stars, making the scene darker and the glare of the funeral pyre the more glaring.

Bugs removed his sandals and slung them over his shoulder. His place in the procession was among those friends of the dead man, not even remotely related, who had come to show respect. They marched in silence, their eyes glittering with unnatural brilliance. For while the funeral would not satisfy their religious instincts, since there would be no *suttee*, no burning of the widow with the corpse of Lal Mukergee, they had swallowed

much *bhang* and opium and their souls trembled on the verge of a religious orgy which only the presence of English police kept within bounds.

A LITTLE wind was rising, and it was a cool wind, with the rain coming behind it. The wailing came down the wind. Bugs edged toward the head of the procession.

The widow and the children, the brother, and—yes, that very fat man was the cousin. It could be no one else. Hair cut, nails cut—the rituals of purification. Clanging of brass . . .

Then the burning, and a frantic widow weeping and screaming—not so much because of grief as because she could not immolate herself with her burning husband.

The cousin would not return to the house. Lal Mukergee had barred him, and there would be no forgiveness now. The word of the dead man stood forever. Where would he go? Bugs, an excellent *babu,* stood close to him; and presently the cousin turned away. He had no interest there, save his own honor that demanded he be at the funeral if possible, lest he lose caste. He walked away, and Bugs followed him.

The cousin walked fast for so fat a man—along the foot beaten road toward the city. He made a short cut and so avoided the native streets. A peal of thunder shook the sky. The cousin hurried, and so did Bugs. But they could not escape the deluge.

At the first spat of rain Bugs unfurled his umbrella and, as one Hindu gentleman of equal caste to another, hastened to the side of the cousin with offer of shelter.

"Thank you," panted the cousin, increasing his pace. "But there is not far to go . . . Here we are."

He waddled into the shelter of a doorway.

"Thank you."

His manner was not hospitable. He turned away from Bugs, and left him in the hallway—walking to a door on which was a sign: Chess Club. As he reached the door it opened and a white man came out. They exchanged greetings, and it seemed to Bugs that the cousin was somewhat afraid of the white man. The white man was short and squat, with black hair and heavy eyebrows. He frowned when he spoke to the cousin. Bugs could not hear what was said. The white man came to the door of the building, ignoring Bugs. Then he went back into the club. When he came out again he had on a raincoat, but Bugs was not there—he had crossed the street and was watching from another hallway. The white man began to walk rapidly in the direction of the river and sailor town. Bugs followed discreetly.

The worst part of Rangoon—a Limehouse of the East. Dives and drinking places of all nationalities; abode of women, of drugs, disease and every vice; sailors' boarding houses, cheap hotels for poor whites; dirt and the drenching rain . . .

The squat white man hurried. He was a powerful looking fellow. He took no notice of the women who beckoned from windows, through which soiled curtains gave glimpses of a strange heterogeneity of furnishings, with nearly always religious pictures and crucifixes in prominent places—as if pathetically to suggest that the poor drab tenant of the room made no pretensions of being other than lost to earth, to country, kin and decency, yet still could claim the comfort of a kindly creed, and the love of the majestic being who could say, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

Into a cheap wooden building which let rooms the squat white man went. Bugs paused outside, thinking rapidly. It was no place for a Bengali *babu,* yet he suddenly dashed excitedly through the doorway, shouting to the astonished mongrel who acted as clerk:

"That white gentleman who just came in—which way did he go? He dropped something which I picked up!"

The clerk, who ordinarily would have told the *babu* to get out, opened his mouth in automatic answer.

"Room 22."

Bugs ran up the carpetless stairway. Room 22 stood at the head of the stairs. Bugs thumped on the door. He heard a hurried, astonished exclamation within, which he pretended to interpret as a bidding to enter. But the door was locked when he turned the handle.

"The door is locked, sar," he shouted.

"Who are you? What do you want?" a gruff voice asked.

"You dropped a rupee," shouted Bugs.

The door was opened, and the squat white man looked out. He did not open the door widely, but Bugs could see inside. At a table sat another white man. This one wore a heavy black beard. On the table was a chessboard with the pieces set up ready for a game.

"Well?" growled the squat man at the door.

"I think you dropped this rupee," said Bugs, holding up the coin. "By the Lord," the squat man exclaimed in English, with a slight foreign accent. "By the Lord, an honest *babu!*"

The man with the beard rose from the table and came to the door, grinning.

"It can't be." His accent was more pronounced than that of the squat man. "There is no such creature as an honest *babu.*"

"Sar!" exclaimed Bugs, as if deeply offended.

"I did not drop a rupee," said the squat man. "Keep it, *babu.* Show it to your wife, give it to your children—so they can hand it down from generation to generation to prove that once, a long time ago, their ancestor had a momentary lapse into honesty. Have the rupee framed, or no one will ever believe it."

The man was cultured, well educated, but the accent persisted. The man with the beard stopped grinning and stared closely at Bugs. His eyes were more than expressive—they were startling. The eyes of a man with some set idea, the eyes of a fanatic; deeply set, brilliant eyes. He seemed suddenly to have doubts about Bugs' story of finding the money.

"What's the trick?" he asked.

"Trick, sar?" Bugs' astonishment was perfect.

"Yes. No *babu* was ever honest; my friend did not drop a rupee. So what is it you want to sell, or what favor do you desire—with this elaborately false introduction? Clever, too!" he ended thoughtfully.

Bugs looked at the squat man.

"I do not understand," he almost wailed. "I am a honest man, that's all. I have nothing to sell."

The squat man leaned forward and gave Bugs a violent push. "Get out of here, honest man!" he exclaimed, and shut the door.

BUGS turned away. Inside the two men were arguing. The man with the beard suspicious that Bugs had some ulterior motive in bringing the rupee, and suggesting questioning the bringer, the squat man laughing and demanding they continue their game. Bugs walked away. There was apparently nothing to be gained by staying around there. He could have gained access to the room by various pretenses, the easiest of which would have been keenness concerning chess, which he played well. But this did not seem to be the best thing to do. He walked down the stairs. As he reached the bottom, the cousin of Lal Mukergee walked into the rooming house. Bugs turned his head quickly, and the cousin did not recognize him.

Outside, in the street, Bugs pondered. The case, made more than ever complicated by the cryptogram, was no clearer. In fact Bugs' shadowing of the cousin had produced nothing except a line on the cousin's friends—the friendship of chess players, the game which brings together so many widely different characters. Bugs had been able to notice only one thing—the apparent fear the cousin had of the squat man. But

this was no help. The squat man looked tough, and that was enough to cow an ordinary *babu*. The cousin might owe him money—likely enough—and this might make him nervous.

Bugs could see nothing to be gained by hanging around in the rain, so he went home.

Who was the "Center" of the cryptogram? Was it the title of some man? Was the cryptogram in any way connected with the murder? Was it, perhaps, just a joke note from one chess player to another? Who had stolen the portfolio? Who, besides Thompson, knew enough and had the confidence of Lal so as to be able to get into the governor's office and give him the lethal dose of aconitine?

If the cryptogram meant anything, what was the "order" which Lal Mukergee had apparently refused to obey, thus meeting his death? It must have been a dangerous order, a criminal order. Deep water, very deep—if the cryptogram were connected with the murder. But was it connected? After all, might not Thompson be the murderer? That idea again seemed the simplest, indeed the only solution to the puzzle.

All Bugs had found out that night was, what he knew before, that the cousin loved chess, and that he had two friends who lived in a bad part of town, and loved chess also. But their rooming house was no worse than fifty others, and the roomers in such places were not necessarily criminals, let alone murderers. The squat man and the man with the beard were two cultured men of foreign manner. The eyes of the bearded man—Bugs had seen chess players with such eyes. Nothing there. But it was certainly unusual for even a chess playing *babu* to visit such white men at their hotel. He took his telephone off the hook and called the governor's residence.

"Inviting myself to breakfast," Bugs said. "Want a talk with you."

"Good," said Cameron. "Eight o'clock—we will be alone."

"Two heads may be better than one, and I don't want to take this affair to the police just yet. Wonder will I ever get the thing straight in my head? More light—yes, I need a lot more!" he thought.

At breakfast Bugs chatted on various subjects, but avoided the murder. There were six swarthy waiters in uniform in the room.

"No sense talking before your *kitmatgars*," he said quietly to Lord Cameron. "Your office is the best, most private place. No, I am still at sea about the thing . . . "

After breakfast they drove down to the government building. They passed the Sikh policeman and walked up the stairs. The governor's office was a suite. First, the outer office where Lal Mukergee had had his desk, and where people with an appointment waited for the governor to see them. Next, the governor's private office, from which opened another room which had no door and which was filled with records. This room was a vault made of steel. Another door from the private office opened to a large room in which the governor held his cabinet meetings. This room had another door, and both doors were always kept locked.

"Got another secretary yet?" asked Bugs as they went upstairs. "No," replied the governor. "I have been trying out a couple of men sent in by the heads of departments in the building—but they don't satisfy me. Lal was too good, you see. His place will be hard to fill. I liked him, too, and I am certain he liked me. In fact, we were really quite fond of each other."

He opened the door.

"The devil!" he said.

And Bugs, looking over the governor's shoulder, saw Lal Mukergee's cousin standing by the late secretary's desk in what was obviously a very nervous state of mind.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the governor sternly. "Who are you? Are you aware that you are liable to arrest for being here? How did you get in, anyway?"

THE cousin clasped and unclasped his hands. He did not, of course, recognize Bugs, who was well dressed and in his proper identity. The cousin stammered.

"My Lord, sir—Governor, sir—ah! I am, you see, my Lord, the cousin of the late Lal Mukergee, who had the distinguished honor, my Lord, of being your Excellency's devoted secretary. Sir, I am a poor but honest person, and a graduate of the same university. I have been so bold as to think that you would like a relation of your late secretary to fill his shoes, my Lord. Hence I came here by the simple process of walking up the main stairway, not knowing that such a misdemeanor subjected me to arrest for seeking honest employment, my Lord. But pray excuse my boldness, which, indeed, arose from my desire to serve you while at the same time earning my livelihood. My Lord—"

"Hold on, *babu!*" exclaimed the good natured governor, trying not to laugh. "It is true that I need a secretary, and your desire to keep the job in the family is laudable. Sit down and wait while I keep an appointment with this gentleman."

The fat *babu* obeyed with what seemed to be a grateful if not graceful bow; and Bugs and the governor went into the private office and shut the door.

Lord Cameron was laughing.

"The inevitable *babu,*" he said. "A perpetual round of amusement—in this case very round; circular, in fact. All I could do to keep my face straight. Wouldn't want to hurt the poor chap's feelings."

"What do you mean to do about this relative of your late secretary?" asked Bugs.

"Ought to give him a chance, what? Lal Mukergee was an awfully decent fellow. Think I'll give this cousin fellow a chance, just for Lal's sake."

"Tomorrow or today?" asked Bugs.

Cameron looked at his friend curiously.

"Why so interested, old man?"

"You haven't changed much since we were at school," answered Bugs quietly. "Good natured, unable to think evil of any one, and so on. I used to look after you, else you would have given all your pocket money away, and what not. The cycle of the years holds true—and I must still take care of you. You will make an appointment—no, I will make it for you—with this cousin of Lal Mukergee. For tomorrow morning. Send him away now. And you will promise me that you will not leave your house tomorrow until I tell you that you may."

"What?" exclaimed the governor.

"Take it easy," said Bugs. "You have enough to think about without having to carry my load, also. I will explain later. You see, I am not quite certain, but—" he dropped into the old way of speaking, using Cameron's nickname when at school—"but, Pickhead my boy, you are going to obey orders—governor or no governor. In the interests of the Province of Burma I am taking charge of you. You know me well enough."

The easy good nature of the governor had dropped from him like a cloak. He regarded Bugs shrewdly.

"Whatever you say," he answered.

"Good soldier!" exclaimed Bugs. "I promise you that I will let you out as soon as I can. Stay at home tomorrow until I call you. I will now speak with the cousin of the late secretary—sounds like those German lessons, eh?"

Bugs went out to the other room.

"His Lordship will give you a trial tomorrow morning. But you must come early. At eight o'clock, not later. The governor will be alone, in his private office. He will have some letters for you to take. When you arrive, knock on the door of the private office, because there will be nobody out here."

"Thank you, sir. Very good, sir—I will be here."

And the fat cousin of Lal Mukergee waddled out.

"Don't you want to tell me anything?" asked Cameron a few minutes later. "What about that cryptogram?"

"The unexpected arrival of the

cousin changed my plan of going into this matter with you," said Bugs. "But I translated the cryptogram, and I will read you the translation. 'Obey order or your heart will stop very suddenly this is final warning. Center.' "

"The devil!" exclaimed the governor. "And what does the word 'order' mean? What was the order?"

"That is what I hope to find out," said Bugs. "I will leave you now. Take things easy. Go home tonight, and stay there until I tell you to come out. This is important. I am now going to have a talk with Williams."

Williams, an American, was the superintendent of police for the Rangoon district.

"I have decided, Yank," Bugs said to Williams, "to become the bait in the business of trying to catch a fish. I am not sure that there is a fish, or any chance of getting a bite, but I am going fishing. Got a rod?"

Williams, a two hundred athlete, looked serious.

"Don't take too much of a chance, old man," he advised.

"Oh, you will be there," said Bugs. "To take care of me. That's why I asked if you had a rod."

"What sort of rod?"

"A stout, single piece bamboo, about ten feet long," said Bugs.

"Can get," said Williams. "Where's the fish pond?"

"Government building. Governor's private office. Early tomorrow morning," said Bugs.

IT WAS a fine morning, between rains. As Bugs had told Williams, he was not sure that any fish would come needing a fish pole. The chances were that a fat cousin of the late secretary would arrive, profuse in promises of good work as secretary but weak on performance. Yet all Bugs' logic and intuition, his interpretation of the Knight's Tour cryptogram—all this pointed to some sinister happening; to something nasty.

Bugs sat at the governor's desk in the large room. The desk was in the middle of the room. Bugs' back was to the door that opened into the room of the secretary. To his right was a screen of carved teakwood. He arranged some papers in front of him, and waited. It was two minutes to eight.

He heard the door of the outer office open—it seemed cautiously, but that effect might have been caused by his nervous tension. Then came a knock on the door of the governor's office.

"Come in," said Bugs.

The door opened. Bugs moved his papers slightly and a small mirror appeared. In this mirror Bugs saw—stealthily approaching with a sinister something in his hand—*not* the cousin but the bearded man he had seen in the cheap hotel, the man with the fanatical eyes. Approaching the desk at which he believed the governor of Burma was sitting. After the fashion of Lord Cameron, Bugs was wearing no coat, only a silk shirt. And in the right hand of the man with the beard was a hypodermic syringe.

All this in seconds. The distance from the door to Bugs was less than ten feet. That hypodermic needle would plunge through the thin silk. And a fifth of a grain of aconitine would swiftly end Bugs' life. All this in the space of a few seconds. Fast as Bugs could move, he would hardly have time. Behind him, advancing with the swiftness and deadly intent of a poisonous snake, was the black bearded man . . .

A sharp intake of breath behind the teakwood screen. Something moved in a downward arc in the morning sunlight. It came down with tremendous force. Williams was a big man and he put all he had into that strike with the bamboo rod. It hit the wrist of the would-be murderer of the governor. That one screamed. With the scream was a tinkle, as the glass hypodermic fell to the floor. And in the same second Bugs turned and hit that black beard with all his strength. The man went down and out.

"Heavens, Bugs!" Williams was exclaiming. "Why take such damn fool chances? It was like giving a cobra a chance to strike you!"

"He did come quick, didn't he?" Bugs was trembling slightly. "It was a fool sort of stunt. But I expected the hypo, and it turned out all right. Good man with a fishing rod, you are, Yank!"

"You damned nut! No wonder they call you Bugs!" exclaimed the American.

He knelt down and put the handcuffs on the man with the black beard, tricing his arms behind his back. The man moved, muttered in a foreign tongue and opened his eyes wildly.

"Let him lie there, the filthy toad," said Bugs. "If you go downstairs I have no doubt you will find the cousin establishing an excellent alibi by talking with some junior *babu* clerks. There were a few obscure points in this case, but the whole thing is as clear as a bell now. It is the cousin's job to come in here and find the governor dead. After I made the appointment it would seem suspicious not to keep it. Probably he would intrigue a clerk to walk to the door with him. His alibi would be perfect. And Cameron's death might have been put down to natural causes, like Lal's—even if some inquisitive soul likc me had found the tiny puncture in his upper right arm, which is quite unlikely and might have been called an insect bite. No clue to the murderer, cousin innocent! Get the cousin, Yank, and drag him in . . . Shut up, you, or I'll grind my heel in your dirty mouth!" This, with a fierceness utterly foreign to him, to the black bearded man on the floor.

Williams went out. Bugs sat down in the swivel chair and lighted his pipe—he needed it. Presently there came a scuffling noise from without, and the superintendent of police appeared, dragging the cousin by the scruff of his neck, half supporting what was fast becoming a nerveless wreck. Williams shut the door of the private office and let go of the cousin, who immediately fell abjectly to the floor.

"Just as you figured about this thing," said Williams. "Talking with a clerk. When I told him that Lord Cameron was waiting for him, and he saw my uniform, he damn near fainted—turned a faint yellow under his brown skin. What next!"

"The question," drawled Bugs. "Question extraordinary! Such things as these always come to it. As you know, Williams, when one of these animals attempts the life of one of our kings, princes or governors, we revert to the time of Henry the Eighth and the methods of the Tower of London of that age. And it's only fair. These anarchists have no mercy, so we show none. You have the various instruments in the padded cell down below the police station, Williams. We will take our prisoners there. But first phone and have that other chap arrested—the one in the cheap hotel; squat chap I told you about last night."

Williams obeyed.

Blackbeard, still on the floor, glaring, cried:

"You can't torture us! It's against your law!"

"We waive all laws in the case of such as you," said Bugs. "Shut up! The more you rave the more you will suffer. And —make up your mind—you are going to be tortured! We English are an easy-going race until pushed too far. Then, as I said, and as you should know, we revert!"

The cousin was near fainting. He could not speak, only cry feebly. He would tell all, tell anything he was asked. No doubt about that. Bugs did not have to be told. One look at the cousin was enough.

The black bearded man tried to turn and face the cousin. Bugs prodded him back with his foot.

"If you tell I'll kill you!" he screamed at the cousin.

"You won't have the chance to kill any one else," drawled Bugs. "You will hang within the month—for the murder of Lal Mukergee!"

BLACKBEARD swore in a foreign language. He writhed and tried to kick Bugs. But his shin was met painfully by the heel of Bugs' shoe. He swore again. A little foam appeared on his lips.

"Yes," went on Bugs, with seeming casualness. "You will die swiftly. As swiftly as aconitine kills, my clever Doctor Blackbeard. But no one will think you died of bradycardia! I'll phone the governor and tell him he may safely come to work."

Bugs looked down and spoke to the cousin.

"It was Blackbeard's idea to make that appointment, eh? You had to be certain the governor would be alone. Glad I was here to oblige you. Get up, or you will be kicked until you do!"

At the police station, Blackbeard was taken away to a cell, and the cousin, now babbling, was taken to Williams' office—along with Bugs and the American. Bugs produced a box of matches.

"We don't use the rack any more," he drawled. "Our first effort will be to put lighted matches under your finger nails."

The cousin was on his knees, hands raised as if in prayer.

"But, sir, you need not! I will tell all. All, ever since Lal Mukergee and I, at college, became mixed up with this anarchist society."

"Shove over a chair, Yank," said Bugs. "Sit in it—you! I don't like to see human beings in that attitude. Get up, and try to sit like a man."

The cousin managed to obey.

"Yes, my Lord!" he gasped.

"Don't call me 'Lord!' Ready to tell me everything?"

"Oh, sir, yes, yes!" wailed the cousin. "Please don't torture me!"

"There is really little you can tell me." Bugs pushed the box of matches away. "But as you have been merely a catspaw —well, maybe I can save you from the hangman. The matches were meant to warn you against trying to confuse me by lying. I would know at once if you lied." He took a notebook from his pocket. "Let me see. Ah!"—he turned over some leaves; Williams saw that there was no writing on the page he stopped at—"case of Lal Mukergee. Anarchist society. You have told me how Lal and you got mixed up with it at college. Here is the rest. Lal, becoming sensible, and a decent fellow at heart, leaves home and comes to Burma, and gets a job as secretary. He persuaded you to come with him, hoping to make you go straight. He was kind to you, but when he refused to lend you more money you send word to 'Center' that you knew where he was, and what he was doing—getting money for the information. Pretty rotten! There is possibly some foreign intrigue behind it all. Do you know what Power?"

"No sir. I swear it. The doctor would not tell me," the cousin was crying, obviously telling the truth.

"I believe you—you were merely a catspaw, not in the confidence of the higher-ups. Never mind, I will find out for myself. Lord Cameron was to be assassinated. Naturally, the anarchists did not want to be caught—and nominated Lal Mukergee, the trusted secretary, for the job. But Lal had come to be very fond of the governor, and would not kill him. Also, he was afraid to. He is threatened by 'Center,' in the code used by the society, the Knight's Tour. But Lal still refused to murder Lord Cameron. Then the anarchists, particularly the doctor who tried to kill me this morning, became afraid that Lal would tell all he knew and get protection from the government. So the doctor with the black beard decided to kill Lal. That was easy—and no trace would be left. Aconitine would make the death seem due to bradycardia.

"The doctor went to Lal's office, just as Lal arrived in the early morning. He probably said that Doctor Thompson was out of town, and had asked him, the doctor with the beard, to take a look at Lal. Lal has never seen this doctor before.

"He is leaning on his desk dreadfully upset when the doctor comes in. Doctor says he needs a stimulant—which was true. The doctor gives him about a fifth of a grain of aconitine, and death is practically instantaneous.

"In Lal's hand was clenched a bit of paper, a cryptogram which he had just received by mail. He did not have time to translate it, but it scared him. The doctor does not notice the cryptogram, and goes out, feeling certain that death from natural causes will be the verdict —which it was. But the doctor, playing safe, as he thought—but wrongly—takes the portfolio with him, so that if there is any suspicion some debtor will be blamed for the murder.

"The address of 'Center' is in Benares! You may prove your wisdom and truthfulness by telling me that address. I have it here in this book, of course. What is it?"

The weeping cousin gave the address.

"Correct," said Bugs, making a notation in the book. "That is all I want of him just now, Williams. Have him taken to a cell."

Williams pressed a button, an officer appeared and the cousin was taken away.

"Telegram blanks—quickly!" Bugs was excited. "Must wire the police in Benares to arrest 'Center' and his gang —there are other governors, you know."

Bugs sent off a number of telegrams.

"We will get 'Center' and his gang," he said. "One or more of them will tell us all. A little money and fear goes a long way, you know. We won't say anything much for publication, and we won't be able to do anything to the foreign Power, but all this is experience, and it's not the first time it has happened."

"Why did they try to get Cameron when so far as we know there have been no attacks on other governors?" asked Williams.

"Probably because Burma looks like the best place to stir up trouble for the Empire—make a beginning here. Burmese are in a state of unrest, you know."

"How did you know 'Center' is in Benares?" asked the American.

"That was simple," answered Bugs. Lal had received the cryptogram in the morning mail. I found the envelop with the Benares postmark in the waste paper basket. It was the only mail Lal had had time to open."

He got to his feet.

"What now?" asked Williams.

"I am going to see Dr. Thompson—I have good news for him," replied Bugs.

A HUNTER POSES

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

A Story of Old Mississip'

JOLE CREED swaggered into the Mendova gun store on a starlit evening, a stocky built, square shouldered youngster to be sitting down among the old-timers around the comfort of the pot bellied soft-coal stove.

"Howdy, folks," Jole greeted familiarly. "Fire sure feels good a night like this."

"Howdy," a voice answered. "Just come in?"

"Ten minutes ago," Jole said cheerfully. "Need a case of ammunition. Sure banging them away down here!"

"I reckon so." The welcomer chuckled. "Heard you were on your way down."

"Prob'ly heard my automatic speaking," Jole laughed. "New gun this Autumn, thirty-two inch barrel and a 12-gage. Shoots close, but she drops 'em sixty yards if a man holds right—and I hold right!"

"I sure bet," the man said.

"Off the river?"

"Oh, yes, Omaha, down. Outboardin' in a hooded skiff."

"Shootin'?"

"Not to speak of—just a few photographs, to remember it by!"

"First trip down?"

"That far, yes," the man said thoughtfully. "Kinda cir'clate around, about every so often. Catch a bass once in awhile."

"Sportsman, I reckon?"

"No, I'm a professional hunter—kind of a sideline with me."

"Tha's so—birds?"

"Mammals. Ain't so good winging birds!"

"Takes a good man to hold right, make it pay," Jole said easily. "But I have the knack. Been at it ever since I was a kid."

"Four, five years?"

"Fifteen. Began shooting when I was eight." Creed chuckled. "Sold a goose, first big'n I ever dropped that same Fall. Up the bank and down the river, all around. Shipped muskrats as marsh squirrels out of Lake Michigan marshes—"

"Clubs, I suppose?"

"Trapper as a kid, and run a canoe through the swimways, picking 'em up. Sure cashed in on private club preserve rats, too!" Creed laughed. "Two thousand two hundred 'leven rats, at four-fifty; that give me my start. Caught the big boom in rats and cashed in on it. Nine thousand net's pretty good for a kid!"

"You bet!"

"I switched around, though, account of I'd rather shoot'n trap. Creed lighted a cigaret. "I sure love popping 'em over. I learned to shoot with a .22 special, trombone. Learned pointing instead of aiming—rabbits, squirrels, flying crows, and knocked down some deer. Spent a winter in the Upper Peninsula. Some trapping, but mostly slam-banging 'em. You know how a kid is—"

"Yes, I know kids." The man chuckled. "You came down two years ago, didn't you? Fisherman telling me about you—they all know you."

"Sure do. I followed the flight down first time from Mowbridge, where the Yellowstone Trail cuts across the Missouri. Came down in a big skiff. Didn't have markets right—commission men sure trimmed me down, but by the time I passed St. Louis I had my teeth cut. Cash in now on feathers as well as birds. Make it all pay's my motto."

"They let you pick them?"

"Let me?" Creed laughed. "I tell them, not them me!"

"How do they know you aren't selling them coots?"

"That's easy. Leave the heads, pinions and feet. The down's what sells. Course, fishing tackle makers want certain of the specialty stuff, so's to make a lot of those flies. I place them through an agent—domestic stock, we tell 'em. That's a joke! Game laws are a joke!"

"State laws, naturally—but about this migration treaty?"

"Say, that's funny. Course, down the big river, as regards States, jurisdiction sure holds up the local wardens." Creed waved his hands good humoredly. "The migration treaty with Canada's Uncle Sam's own proposition. He's got twenty-eight men enforcing the law, and that's sure comical; why say, that's less'n one a hundred thousand square mile. You can see how that'd be, one man covering New York, Pennsylvania and most all of New Jersey thrown in—around twenty-four million population or so. What can one man do, anyhow?"

"That's so—now I wonder!" The photographer nodded, knocking some ashes out of a Missouri meerschaum pipe, to fill it again.

He was a tall, spare, weathered man, his cheeks red with winds and sunshine, his hat wide, his limbs long; he wore rubber boots with the tops dangling down.

"GOING clear down?" Creed asked.

"Well, I don't know," the man answered. "My family's kind of anxious I should get back. You

see, I live up in Idaho, in the Teton Basin. They call me Teton Peak, up in that country. Used to ride some, hunt some, but guided a bit after I retired from cattle and land, and went into photographing when game kinda scarced out. Travel around, now, when I get restless. Thought I'd look down the river. Always did want to go down the Missouri and Mississippi in a rowboat, or something. Learned to run an outboard over on the Columbia, photographing birds there."

"Is that so? Say, you know, I'd like to have some poses took of me in action," Creed said with enthusiasm. "You know, shooting Yankee Bar in that storm last week, it was sure fine—course I don't suppose you could take snapshots in a rain?"

"You oughta see my sets of lenses!" Teton Peak chuckled. "I just about bet my cameras are the best instruments seen down this old yellow stream in many a day, if ever!"

"How much do you charge for making poses?"

"Oh, that's all right." The man shook his head. "I'm not that kind of professional photographer. I do some scenic work—take a prize once in awhile in newspaper, amateur and other contests. I'd just like to have a set of films showing a real gunner down this way."

"Well, say, Teton Peak, you've met the boy who can show you how it's done," Creed assured him. "Only question is if you can work as fast with a camera as I can shoot with a gun!"

"Well, as to that, we can try anyhow," the big photographer said. "I'm a leetle old, a bit stiff—but my eyes are pretty good yet and, as I say, I've some fine lenses, big ones, and the focal plane shutters don't let much time pass, the way they slot the light down over the films. My films, too, are double speed—so fast a man can't even work them in a developer by red or orange lights. Have to do it in the dark, but they are sure chemically perfect and if a man handles them according to time they don't fail very often."

"Where are you tied in?"

"Down't the Mud Bar."

"That's where I am, too." Creed said. "Perhaps you noticed my outfit—gray-blue battleship paint. I come right in big 's life when I'm in town. When I'm out for business, though, nobody sees me. Perhaps they hear the rolling of the echoes, but they sure have to use a microscope if they want to know where I'm working."

"I'll bet."

"What kind of a boat do you use? You said a skiff?"

"Quite a big one, twenty-foot skiff with a big yellow hood."

"Oh, yes! Noticed that. Didn't I come past you in Centennial Cutoff, Island 36—somewhere along there?"

"Yesterday, day before, perhaps."

"I plow right along when I come down," Creed said. "I can't stand it just drifting."

"Seems like you'd stay with the flight."

"Just 'zactly what I do," the market hunter said. "I start down on the head of it. I pick a good stand, where they'll be coming in fast, and by the time a storm blusters along, I'm all set for them. I've been down twice, now. All I have to do is look a country over once, and I can pretty near tell where they are going to drop in, the traveling Canadians, brent, all those big fellows. Take it with the ducks, mallards, canvasbacks, good lines like them, of course I handle them, too, flight stands where they come from the river back into the brakes and out again."

"They feed in the timber?"

"If you ain't been back from the river banks you haven't seen this country," Creed said. "Has he, boys? No, sir! Biggest part of the Lower Mississippi's back in the Bottoms. Some of the doggondest country you ever saw. I work up the rivers—did you stop at Reelfoot Lake? Say, ain't that a funny place, all full of dead trees? I shot there a few days. Course, I never showed up at

Sanborn, Reelfoot, Tiptonville, any of the docks. I landed in at the levee below Hickman, hired a darky with a little truck and he carried my outfit down to the water. I have a shooting punt with a little outboard, a slick medicine too; doesn't make a sound. I carried in a thousand shells, two guns, to shoot cripples, a .22 rifle. Oh, I sure have the outfit."

"Reckon you're always ready for them?"

"I'll say! Why, if you noticed, I have a low cabin on my scow." Creed chuckled. "If you'll look at the roof, it's painted. Camouflage. If you looked down on it like a flock of ducks, when I'm screened out, you wouldn't know it was there. Fact! I stretch out a few sticks, spread a little canvas and all it is to look at is a drift pile in the water. Got the idea from looking down on muskrat and beaver houses. Flocks of birds coming along they see a floating island. All I got to do is let go through windows or over the decks. It fools wild geese, old ones, and it has to be good to do that, you know."

"Say, you know, that's an idea—but they won't come near a driftpile."

"Doesn't look like a driftpile!" Creed said. "Looks like just a few gray snags spreading around on the water, or on the sand, the way it is painted. When it's raining, why ducks or wild geese fly right down to it. One time a blue heron lighted on it! I heard him bump. I begin shooting around twenty yards, and with two guns I can handle them, close up scatterer to forty yards, and then I grab my long gun to sixty-five. After that it's just a matter of picking off the cripples with the .22 automatic."

"You must get gobs of them sometimes."

"Twenty-five, thirty, sometimes forty birds out of one flock," Creed said. "Course, that's ducks. Up to Yankee Bar a funny thing happened. A long line of Canadians came down, about thirty on one wing and the other leg of the V stretched away for about a hundred birds. Lots of them don't fly in formation now. These came down as pretty as I pleased. I began on the big pointer, and took 'em down, one, two, three. They busted up, but it was downwind and as they turned and swung the gale put them overhead the prettiest you ever saw. Gad, say, I wish you'd been there to snap that! Close up I picked off five, of course, and then the Long Tom let go—five times. No time to load, of course, and I've been thinking I'd ought to have three or four shotguns for emergencies. I had the .22 cripple automatic, though, and I went to work with it. I'm a liar if I didn't take nine more with bullets—they were hanging just right, breasts for marks, and the last one down was ninety-six paces away, long yards. Wind brought him back thirty yards, I figured, too."

"That would have been a wonderful photograph. Light good?"

"Fine shooting light. I don't know so much about cameras," Creed said. "The clouds were opened up a bit, no blue but lots of white."

"They use the kind of lens I have for football and other games even on a wet Thanksgiving day," Teton Peak said. "I'd sure like to try my films on you—"

"Paper says look out for weather day after tomorrow," Creed said. "I'm buying some supplies tomorrow and will drop out at three o'clock sharp. That'll give me time to make the Governor Bar down the line. Better come along with me. Between towns I'm not so easy to find."

"I'd sure take it kindly. I haven't any good duck shooting poses down the Mississippi."

"Well, here's where you sure get them right, then!" Creed laughed. "And all I ask is you'll let me have a few of the good ones so I can show the girls how I handle 'em."

"Married?"

"Nope. I'm a professional duck hunter, and on the job soon's the goslin's are practising their wings."

"I've been waiting a long time for a

chance like this." The photographer sighed, refilling his pipe.

THE two went out when the gunstore closed about nine-thirty o'clock, eating over on Hungry Man's Row. The hunter was young, but he sure could teach that old-timer from the high plateaus a lot about shooting birds. They were moored within a few hundred feet of each other down on the Mud Bar, and Teton Peak moved his boat over to the gunner's fleet of cabin boat, punt, outboard skiff and folding canoe.

In the morning they had breakfast together, at a restaurant uptown. They circulated around, buying supplies, taking on fresh and cured meats and vegetables, and Creed brought down a case of ten thousand shells of ammunition from the express office. He had to have plenty of shells and he took advantage of the wholesale rates. He could sell any left over.

"I'm one of the last of the good professional hunters," he told the photographer. "Lots of the old-timers have been scared off. Some are kinda worried, too, about the wild game getting killed off. Sure is lots of shooting, but the way things are going, I'll be fixed for a session with some of those big deer over'n Africa, or somewhere like that. You know, I tell you, wouldn't I like to get a whack at one of those herds they tell about? I've an idea a machine gun'd do the trick, teaching some of those lords and swells a trick or two, getting into them right. Wow! But wouldn't I like to handle a lion with about four hundred and fifty shots a minute? That'd be music, you bet—knock over a dozen lions, kerslam! It just seems as though I could never get enough shooting."

"Well, you're young—"

"But mighty few've had my experience."

"That's so—and you're young—"

"Forty years ahead of me!"

At three o'clock sharp on that afternoon, the market hunter took on the line of the photographing tripper and the two men sat in the launch with which Creed towed his little fleet. The motor purred sweetly, while the water slopped from the cooling system overboard, the cutwaters and overhangs hissing and splashing.

"She's milking over," Creed chuckled. "Getting gray and the sun's faded out. Sometime tonight the storm'll break, probably, and that'll give us tomorrow on the bar."

"Know where you're going?"

"I sure do." The youngster chuckled. "Shot there last year. Big bar, inside chute and always are geese there. I'd rather kill geese. They're big—they thump when they fall. Heavier to handle, don't bring quite so much, hundred for hundred weight, I figure, but the fun's livelier. Takes a better man to land geese to amount to anything, too. We'll get ready tonight, and I'll have to do some figuring, placing you for making poses. I wanta have some good faces, too, the way I go after them. I tell you, I'm all business in a blind."

Good as his word, Creed fashioned a blind that was a work of art. It was in thin and scattering switchwillows, and the way the photographer's nest was built, he would have every chance to take the gunner as he emerged from his own hole in the sand. Teton Peak was amazed.

"This is on the south line flight of the geese and ducks both," Creed said, "and local birds hanging over in the lakes and bayous come through here, just below that brake, there. I noticed that both times I shot here."

"Intend to stay here long?"

"About three weeks, probably," Creed answered. "By that time the heft of the Fall flight will be down and I'll make a long jump to head them again. Of course, I go in fair weather. I never miss a storm, shooting somewhere."

"You sure have the way of getting them," Teton Peak said.

"You bet!"

"Have trouble shipping sometimes?"

"Listen—" Creed laughed, "shipping's where a man lives. He doesn't tell that to anybody!"

"Of course he couldn't," Peak said. "Personally, I'd hate to know anything about that phase—if something happened a man couldn't help but think something."

"We don't stand for any interference by anybody," Creed said. "Now we'll just sweep out all these tracks. A goose won't come within a mile of a man's tracks in the sand. I've an extra pair of cow hoofs in skate frames you can wear when we come out in the morning. By circling around, like a cow browsing on the switches, it fools the geese."

"Bet you invented that?"

"I use my head."

A gale broke before dawn, and after the hail and swirls, the storm settled down for a three-day Norther. The two men ate breakfast and, each with his own line, headed over to the blinds where five hundred shells had been placed during the night ready for business. Jole Creed was transformed from a white collared sport into a workman, in a suit that was waterproofed and stained by many campaigns. It was, he said, his luck suit, just as he still carried a .22 caliber single shot pistol, his first cripple killer. He asked no odds of any one, when it came to his craft. At the same time, he tossed a coin to see what the day would bring.

"Good luck." He laughed. "Today's the biggest day I ever had, perhaps. Listen to 'em!"

Travelers were going by in the dark wind. Birds caught in the storm were darting by, looking for water, places to light. One flock came so close that the two men ducked. Being hit by three or four pounds of wildfowl, hurtling at sixty or eighty miles an hour, has killed many a human. Creed knew a fellow who was knocked senseless by a dead goose that came down as he turned to shoot another.

"Not much chance of being hurt, though," Creed said. "Besides, I keep my eyes open."

Creed wasted no time. Two minutes after he had his guns laid out he could see a little, and five ducks tumbled to the bar from two shots before even the lens of the photographer could "see". A little later broad day was at hand, and though the clouds flew low, breaks in them let through a lot of light, and Teton Peak, too, was busy.

"Bet you never saw anything like this," Creed shouted across to him.

"That's so!" Teton called back, and presently, during a lull, Creed ran out to gather up kills. He stood with two geese in each hand, a heap of twenty or so ducks at his feet. He killed so many that after a time he could not stow them in his blind, but spread them out or huddled them as if sleeping in the sand—working like a taxidermist in studying poses. He was good, sure enough.

FOR hours the flight continued. The throwing of the guns lost its snap. Weariness grew upon the gunner's shoulders, despite his practise and exercise. He had never been rushed so fast, never had so big a day, and toward noon he began to snatch bites of sandwiches, gnaws of beef. He didn't care to eat ducks himself; was fairly sick of the sight of them, as far as food value appealed to him, he said.

"I'd better take some closeups," Teton Peak suggested. "Suppose I could have some at four or five feet?"

"I reckon so—for a while," Creed said. "You'll have to keep out of my way, though; I swing around fast sometimes."

"So I see."

The photographer slipped over into the shooting blind, his focal plane shutter instrument in one hand, a small snapshot in the other, and his bag of extra films over his shoulders. He took his place back in the corner of the cover, the lens in the shadow and the shooter looming, when he sat up, giving face shots with elbow, shoulder, gunbutt and

other parts swinging with sharp jerks as the shots were made.

Methodically the photographer snapped away. He had made dozens of exposures. Creed laughed at his extravagance, making commonplace details so often the object of his efforts. The afternoon had come. Wrist watches agreed that it was after one o'clock when over west, on the main Mississippi channel, a launch appeared, its trunk cabin brown and its body a dull white. The boat swung around to head up stream, coming across the dead water opposite the blinds. A lone skipper threw over a mudhook, holding the boat off shore by the stern. He came over the bow, waded ashore and started for the blinds.

"What the hell?" Jole Creed exclaimed. "Who the devil's that? What's he up to, anyhow? He better look out—"

"He will, all right," the photographer said, and he closed his focal plane instrument with a snap. "He's my partner—sidekick, Cap'n Ledding."

"What!" the market hunter demanded, turning in a fury, only to find himself looking into the cold, dripping muzzle of a .45 six-gun.

For a moment Creed's fingers whitened, so tightly did he grip—for the last time—that hot barrel of his automatic shotgun. He flushed red, rage and hatred of humbled pride in his features, and then he relaxed, dropped the weapon, swayed and turned white.

"I'm Teton Peak, as the boys call me," the photographer said. "My partner and I, like you said, cover more'n two hundred thousand square miles of Uncle Sam's hunting country, but Old Mississip's less'n a mile wide, and mostly the ducks come down it, in under the wild geese. This is your big day, sure 'nough, Jole Creed—but that isn't your real name. You thought back home you'd pass for real respectable. Well, violating the United States treaty enforcement laws is a Federal offense, and you go before the commissioner tomorrow morning, charged with something like two hundred counts of violation."

The proud youngster wilted. The heaped up birds accused him. The scores of empty shells around him, flung out by the auto-ejection, every one damned him now.

"Howdy, Teton—looks like you sure had this man roped and hogtied," the newcomer hailed.

"It sure do," the captor said. "There's the birds—"

"Any pictures?"

"Been working the shutters all morning, Cap'n. Got 'bout a hundred good ones, I expect."

"He let you do it!"

"Oh, yes. He wanted a set of them—how he does the business."

"That's funny."

"Mr. Jole Creed, make you 'quainted with Cap'n Ledding. He's another Federal game law enforcer, like me."

Creed gulped, but he shook hands.

"This is one on me," he said, his voice hollow; and then, explosively, "Can't a man be just the damndest fool sometimes?"

"Everybody once—and if he has sense, just once!" Teton Peak suggested earnestly.

"If I'd just kept my fool mouth shut—"

"Half your fun was bragging how good you were, kid," Ledding said. "Your other half can come from knowing we had you anyhow. That big shipment by truck out from Yankee Bar we picked up at the market. We took over the feather company, too, on the strength of your bales of down."

"Then this is a roundup?"

"Sure is!"

"What'll I have left?"

"Not much, considering your outfit," Peak said. "When the commissioner sees the birds and photographs—"

"Let's get it over with." Jole Creed sighed. "I see where I get a job, now, and day wages for a spell."

"That's what we have—jobs and day wages," Teton assured him. "Hunting hunters."

Loading up for Urga

By WM. ASHLEY ANDERSON

WITH the Gobi dust hissing along the cold cement of the bungalow veranda, and shrieking under the tiled eaves, we'd hear through the boisterous night the doleful clunk of camel bells. Hator would be coming with his string from the camel inn; and that would mean a thousand camels to be loaded for Urga in the morning.

This was the way we made up our caravans to cross the Gobi, from Kalgan at the mouth of the Kalgan Pass that rises up to the bleak plateau region stretching away northward into the Siberian Steppes, to Urga, thirty days' march away. We would first count our loads, allowing not more than three hundred pounds to a camel, varying according to season and the condition of the beasts—candles, medicines, piece goods, cigarets. Then we would ride through Kalgan town, along the great, rutted, dusty thoroughfare, perhaps the most traveled road, historically, in all the world. Long irregular lines of caramel colored camels, floods of sheep sweeping along in fogs of dust; Peking carts and bullock carts lumbering and bounding in rock ribbed ruts; hairy ponies darting and zig-zagging through the tumult; and all along the way the stalls and shops of blacksmiths, wagon menders, dealers in hides, sheepskins, fur, fodder, all the commodities that find ready sale in a caravan town.

Following this road at a rapid trot, suffocated by dust, dodging right and left, cursing, yelling amid an uproar of ringing bells and noisy animals, we would come to the Village of Exiles, a picturesque walled square,under the shadow of the Great Wall of China through which political offenders passed in the old days to permanent exile in the bleak, barbaric world outside the sanctuary gate.

Once through this gate we were in the Pass itself. Here we found a Mongol or Chinese camel agent, through whom we negotiated for transportation across the desert, exactly as we would negotiate with a ship's broker for space on a freighter.

When we had agreed on details of price per load, time limit for the journey, penalties and guarantees, we would sign a contract and depart, knowing that the camels would be ready for loading when required. The camel agent would assemble the camels in small groups from the camelmen, who kept their beasts at the upper end of the Pass where fodder was cheap, or still farther beyond where forage was free.

In the morning then we would awaken to a great bawling, gurgling and yelling in the compound, and look out the window upon a billowing sea of dusty camel humps, extending through our gates and out into the open as far as we could see. Then would follow a day of apparently great confusion—camels being continuously loaded, and fading away into the dusty obscurity beyond, passing out the compound gate in strings of six, tied from nose to tail, and led by a copper faced Mongol in a sheepskin on foot.

Darkness would fall, and again would come the measured, doleful clunk of the camel bells, outward bound, headed through the deep rocky channel of the Kalgan Pass for the hazards beyond.

A perfunctory report would go to Shanghai, accompanied by a copy of the bill of lading. But next day, Shroder and I, wearing enormous Gilghat boots lined with camel wool, and goatskin coats, would be trotting up the Pass to see the caravan safely on its way.

Conclusion of a Two-Part Story

GUEST OF HONOR

By GEORGES SURDEZ

AFTER the high adventure of the Great War, Captain Pierre de Sarges found the peace time routine of the French army intolerable. Bored, he grew careless in the discharge of his duties, and one of his subordinates, a quartermaster major, took advantage of his laxity. Over De Sarges' signature the fellow diverted vast quantities of army goods to his own gain.

De Sarges' heroic record notwithstanding, he was adjudged guilty by a military court, and dishonorably discharged from the army he loved and had served so gallantly. Burning with a desire for vengeance, upon the first meeting with the man who had been his undoing, De Sarges administered such a severe beating to the fellow that he was removed to a hospital—and De Sarges became a fugitive from justice on a charge of felonious assault.

Assuming the alias of Pierre Mercadier, De Sarges fled to North Africa. And, in time, the former soldier of France was well on his way to wealth in a commission business of his own. But here again Fate intervened. Jealous of Pierre, competitors bribed his stenographer to steal his private papers on the long chance that something discreditable might be discovered—and their wildest hopes were realized. Pierre's true identity was revealed to the police; he was arrested, sentenced to two years' imprisonment .. But on the way to the prison in Oran, Pierre tricked his guard, Detective Bourquin. Once again he was a free man, fleeing the forces of the law.

In Fez, under yet another name—Salvadez—Pierre made a connection with the firm of Abednour Brothers, army commission men; and here again he went ahead rapidly. With war stirring the Riff, business was flourishing; and knowing the breed, Detective Bourquin followed Pierre as surely as a hound on scent. One night in a camp not far behind the guns, the policeman accosted Pierre—who dropped him with a punch and once more fled.

A passing truck picked him up, discharged him near the firing line. Pierre walked aimlessly forward. The smell of burned powder was like wine to him. But here every civilian was suspected. He was stopped by Sergeant Kruysanker and taken before Lieutenant Michelon. Michelon! Pierre De Sarges

stood before a man who had served under him in France!

Michelon was delighted to see his former superior officer, urged him to enter the Legion. At first Pierre demurred; but finally agreed. Thus he became Sergeant Zajac, and the next day he marched with the Legion to break through to the road of Fez-Taza.

Despite the fact that Pierre was soft from years of luxury, he withstood the grueling march stoically, winning the respect of his men. And when the company deployed for battle, he crouched beside Michelon.

In the near distance native warriors cautiously revealed themselves. A single automatic, at Michelon's signal, coughed hastily at the target. There followed long bursts crackling from the Tirailleurs' machine guns on the slopes . . .

"HERE they come!" some one said. A long line of warriors appeared, running rapidly forward down the ravine, straight for the Legion's lines. Thirty-odd automatics opened up with perfect timing, and it was ended in a flash. The natives scattered, disappeared once more, leaving two sprawled figures behind. Pierre noticed that bayonets now tipped the riflemen's weapons. Legionnaires trotted up from the rear, laden with ammunition satchels.

Michelon had relaxed, was smoking a thick cigar. He turned toward Pierre, smiled faintly. His former captain knew him fully for the first time since they had met again. The younger man had always smiled so, with mingled confidence and relief, after the first shots.

"Nothing to do but hit them as they come, from now on," Michelon predicted. "All a question of volume of fire." He took the cigar from his mouth to indicate the machine guns on the hills. "Even if they get to us, they'll be flanked. But it won't be healthy right here, in that case."

He was right. There was nothing to be done save hit them as they came. And they came in swelling numbers, at more and more frequent intervals. It appeared impossible that they could ever come close; it seemed that they must melt away before reaching the lines. But the attack was an incoming tide, each wave of which crept nearer as if the onslaughts gathered momentum from each repulse preceding. Before long, one of their groups was near enough for grenades to be exchanged. And the Riff grenades were not the usual homemade missiles.

"No tin cans this time," Michelon said.

Pierre also had recognized the sharper explosions of European grenades. But they were not of French manufacture. Probably they came from captured Spanish stocks, or possibly from lots smuggled into the Riff from neutral nations. A Legionnaire came from the front line, holding on to his arm. The limp fingers hanging from the sleeve dripped blood.

"One killed, Lieutenant," he reported as he passed. "They know their business, those slobs."

Michelon led his liaison group nearer the line.

Now the attacking waves came almost upon the guns at each rush. The lieutenant ordered rifle-grenades dropped on the figures they left behind. It was an old trick for a few to sham death, to be closer for the next rush. For on this occasion, the enemy's purpose was to smash through at any cost, and they sought rather than avoided hand to hand fighting.

The Legionnaire nearest Pierre lurched against him, embraced him with both arms. They fell together, and Pierre pushed himself free angrily. But the other did not rise, remained with his body twisted, knees and one shoulder to the ground. Another private reached out, straightened the corpse, lifting the *képi* for a second.

"Dead?" Michelon asked.

"I'll bet on it, Lieutenant," the other replied.

For the first time, Pierre became aware that the enemy was shooting also, and that bullets vibrated near his face constantly.

"Better lie down," the lieutenant suggested. He crouched lower himself, legs bent under his torso.

The Riffi were coming on again. In the mass of white, brown, gray and striped cloaks, several black *gandouras* were conspicuous. These were Abdel Krim's regulars, always the first to appear, the last to run. Pierre had heard before that they were fine fighting men. Whether inspired by loyalty to their leader, pride of corps, patriotism, they were good leaders. Had the entire attacking force been composed of such men, the battle would have been over quickly.

These black chaps threw the grenades, threw them like well trained grenadiers.

And as Pierre watched, one of them sacrificed himself for the whole. He was tall, black bearded, handsome, as he stood flinging his missiles on the crew of the nearest automatic. He dropped, but his followers charged in, and the weapon suddenly ceased firing. The attackers converged toward the spot.

PIERRE did not wait for orders. He reached the place as soon as the riflemen from the nearer groups. The rest was not a matter of thinking, but of action. The tips of the bayonets made the Moroccans hesitate, and they crouched low, clubbing their guns to strike at the Legionnaires' shins. Not every one of the soldiers succeeded in shifting his guard in time. Some fell, and a man down was a man dead. Pierre pushed through the mêlée, toward the two warriors who were carrying away the captured automatic rifle.

They held on to their prize an instant too long. Pierre kicked the nearest one in the groin, grappled with the other. The muzzle of his automatic pressed against the man's ribs, and he pulled the trigger twice. By the time he turned around two Legionnaires had propped up the recaptured automatic and were clearing their immediate front at point-blank range.

"You stick with it," Michelon ordered, before leaving the spot.

Pierre picked up a Lebel carbine, found cartridges in a nearby pouch. His promotion had been swift: he was a group commander. But he could not recall who had been in charge, and no one seemed to know. The men with him were newcomers, one or two from liaison groups, the rest from the reserve section of the other company. The original crew seemed to have been wiped out.

The attack was broken up. And as he had not known that he was fired upon until a man fell near, his first knowledge that the artillery had opened up came when he saw the explosions of shells in the ravine. The effect was awesome, for the fragments of steel were multiplied by fragments of rocks, by flying pebbles from the river bed. The improvised gun crew had settled down to smooth performance, the long clips succeeded one another in the breech without perceptible intervals.

Five yards ahead the corpse of a Legionnaire rested in a ludicrous position, the seat of the pants higher than the head. Pierre crawled forward and grasped one ankle, to pull him straight. One arm stretched out, bearing the double gold stripes of a sergeant. Pierre recognized the slender hand, and a gold ring on the finger. It was Marz. A sweeping knife blow had ripped his belly open.

The sentence of death delivered by Moscow had been executed.

From that time on Pierre was too absorbed by his own job to discern anything clearly. Men were falling, and the natives came on steadily. But there were fewer and fewer of the black warriors; the rest were obviously growing discouraged. Mowed down by the automatics, severely punished by the artillery, they had lost hope.

In a lull of the battle, bugles sounded on the slopes, and dark masses of native troops doubled down, split into smaller fractions fringed with bayonets. The Tirailleurs were counter-attacking. Michelon blew his whistle, and the sections of Legion formed, ready to pursue.

Instead, the lieutenant and several of the noncoms gestured:

"Aside, aside. Fall back to the right—"

Before the infantry passed Spahis, at the gallop. At their head rode a youthful officer in khaki, braced on the stirrups, naked blade pointed forward. Pierre heard his screaming command as he rode by, and his men flashed in a thunderous mass, red and white, gleaming with moving sabers. There were about one hundred and fifty, and they spurted into the ravine at breakneck speed.

After the methodical preparations of the night, the grim killing of the morn-

ing, these glamorous riders appeared beings from another world. The Legionnaires, prosaic day laborers of strife, cheered with sudden excitement. This was war—fabled, spectacular war. And not only did the sight thrill the Legion, but the good wishes of all were sincere. Among all other troops, the Spahi alone is esteemed as almost an equal by the Legionnaire.

The whistles shrilled again. The emergency gunner shrugged, brought down to commonplace thoughts, and addressed Pierre with a wry smile.

"Now for stiff fatigue."

CHAPTER VIII

CITED FOR GALLANTRY

CAPTAIN KERDAVAN paced the beaten earth floor of the hut serving as detachment headquarters with long, jerky strides. His hands were clasped behind his back. The noncoms of his company were lined near the door, at attention. Michelon stood on the other side of the folding table. The lights of the two lanterns shot amazing displays of shadows against the mud hued walls.

"I have congratulations for you," the captain continued. "Congratulations, compliments. General commanding mobile group, colonel commanding march regiment. Both pleased. There will be citations. Excellent idea. Believe in encouraging soldiers myself. But there's something else. I was watching. When I watch, I see. When I see, I remember. That's understood. That's known. Between ourselves there were some poor moves. And—" he paused accusingly—"one of the automatics jammed. It jammed twice!"

A sergeant stepped forward, saluted.

"Yours? Speak."

"I did the best that could be done, Captain. I asked twice to have that gun replaced. There's a worn claw on the extractor. The empty shell sticks in and the gun jams."

"There's an armorer to fix that."

"I've put in requisitions for spare parts, Captain," the armorer-sergeant spoke. "We move about so much they have not reached us."

"Excuses," Kerdavan snapped, "might do outside Legion. In the Legion guns work when needed. Without that, no Legion. Damn shame things like that happen in my company. Don't like it. Makes a captain seem a clown, leading cobblers. Foolish business." He relented somewhat. "Just the same, you're a pack of brave swine. You may go, Lieutenant. Dismissed."

Pierre was about to leave with the rest.

"Zajac!"

"Captain?"

"Remain here."

"Very well, Captain."

The door closed, and they were alone. Kerdavan prowled aimlessly about the room, whirled and came to a halt before Pierre. He handed him a cigaret from his own provision.

"At ease. Matches on the table."

"*Merci, mon Capitaine.*"

"Zajac, you're a conceited man!" When Kerdavan was sure that Pierre was too astounded to reply, he resumed. "Must distinguish yourself right away. Can't wait. Bad business. You ask Michelon—ask me—keep your identity secret. Then you seek to be conspicuous. Not logical. Foolish."

"What did I do, Captain?"

"Name Zajac not yours. Irregular. Now, Zajac cited. In records—regimental decision. Read everywhere. Meknes, Fez, Sidi-bel-Abbès. You saved automatic No. 4, after Marz was killed. Excellent work, general opinion. Very foolish, personal opinion. Understand?"

"Seemed the proper thing at the time, Captain."

"Of course. Old habit of yours being cited. But now—citation in newspapers. See?"

"May I ask you not to cite me, Captain?" Pierre asked.

"No. Am not citing you. Colonel

commanding march regiment citing you." Kerdavan shrugged. "Came to my post. Had glasses. Looked. Not blind."

"No, Captain," Pierre answered the challenging glance.

"Saw it all. Good behavior. Asked who was sergeant who saved gun. Orderly replied, 'New man, Zajac,' Colonel told me, 'Note the name. Military Medal. Saved gun. Saved line.' Exaggeration—he's a line infantry colonel."

"He may forget, Captain," Pierre said hopefully.

"Never forgets. That kind. Met me this afternoon. Asked, 'Where's Zajac's citation? I want to add a line. Fine lad. Must be pushed ahead fast.' You understand Michelon must now explain to headquarters about Zajac being with us. Foolish business. Tell him. You drink?"

"Occasionally, Captain."

Kerdavan poured golden liquid out of a leather covered metal flask into two glasses. He picked up his own after touching Pierre's with the brim.

"Your health. Old stuff. Older than we are. Better than we are. Good for stomach." Kerdavan smacked his tongue against his palate. "Been thinking about you. Have a plan later." The captain offered his hand. "Dismissed. You're a rotten civilian but a fine soldier. Compliments."

Lieutenant Michelon had already learned of the citation granted Sergeant Zajac. But he accepted the fact with stolid philosophy. He reassured Pierre to some extent.

"I've informed regimental headquarters that Zajac had turned up here. Here's your official explanation: You had been six years in the bush, consequently believed your enlistment at an end. But you grew worried and came to Morocco, where you heard of me. Thought I could straighten things out, as I knew you."

"Rather involved," Pierre pointed out.

"That argument is full of holes, but the matter is getting so complicated that they'll be willing to end it. Your citation will help. And by the time they've asked for precisions and sent for your papers, you'll have gone. Apply for medical examination. And obtain sick leave. Once away from here, in uniform—"

"But I am not sick," Pierre said.

"Leroy will fix that. Ask him. He knows many tricks."

"You encourage and abet malingering?" Pierre wondered.

"You're a civilian, really."

"Yet it must be hard for you to do, Michelon."

The lieutenant nodded.

"Not easy. But the alternative is possible discovery of my fraud or your enlisting for an additional year in the Legion. I understand you like your comforts. You won't find them with us."

"I'm getting used to it," Pierre told him. "But I can't say I'd like to work at it for a year."

"All right—we must get you out safely."

THE two companies were moved the following day to occupy trenches in a sector some miles northwest. And Zajac became a part of the company. The group had been reformed with reinforcements from Algeria: a few old Legionnaires, the majority pink cheeked youngsters. The Riff campaign had brought the Legion into the papers, and volunteers were pouring in, seeking only one thing: action.

Pierre messed with the section's noncoms, as agreed. He grew to like and esteem his companions. Adjutant Schick kept rigid standards of politeness at the table, and Pierre discovered that even in the foreign regiments, this was not an ordinary gathering. Kruysanker was the only man who stood out, being inferior in breeding, manners and culture to the others. But he was a brave soldier, and even if a bit vain, was well

liked. At meals, German and French were employed with equal frequency, as all spoke the two tongues well.

Bukowski did not speak much. He had been Marz's particular friend, although the Hungarian had served the Bolsheviks who had exiled him from home. When Marz happened to be mentioned, Bukowski would go into a fit of depression. For this ill, the Russian knew only one cure, drink.

He drank anisette neat, by the tumbler. His resistance to alcohol was astonishing. Pierre would see him before the bottle, sipping steadily, hour after hour. His orderly, also a Russian, an enormous, waddling fellow, would replace the empty quart with a fresh one. By the middle of the second bottle, Bukowski would rest his head on his arms, and cry himself to sleep.

The others would not interfere with him. If necessary, one of them would go out to attend to the Russian's duties.

Schick, on closer acquaintance, disclosed certain domineering tendencies. But he was on the whole interesting, and Pierre willingly gave him the attention he craved, reading his notes, scanning his sketches on the major operations of the World War.

"Hindenburg?" the adjutant would say. "The man of one battle. Ludendorf? An organizer. Two men on our side understood actual warfare: Von Hutier and Von Mackensen. Your greatest leader was unlucky: Nivelle. The rest of them? Creatures of circumstance."

Leroy scorned military tactics. He loved poetry and declaimed in three languages—French, Italian and German—verses composed by Legionnaires, about the Legion. As for Kruysanker, his passion was card tricks, and he grew to be rather a bore at times. Down on the rolls as Ernest Zajac, Pierre kept his own first name among his new friends. Just as Pierre had always tried to keep his own baptismal name, the others used theirs. For instance, Kruysanker received letters addressed to Leopold Kruysanker, yet the heading of the first sheet would be "My dear Adolphe". Schick, who was officially called Otto, was known as Walter.

Within two weeks, he had learned the company gossip, the company's likes and dislikes.

Lieutenant Michelon was the object of a devotion rare even in the corps. This comparatively young man—he was about twenty-eight—had perfect control of his soldiers. His extreme calm under fire, his gentleness, were known throughout the Legion.

The feeling toward Kerdavan was one of humorous veneration. The Legionnaires liked to imitate the captain's peculiar, terse speeches. His habit of mixing blame and praise in one breath was appreciated: "I'm satisfied with you, but don't do it again. You're a malingerer and only fit for the Disciplinary Company, but when all is considered, a good man."

MEANWHILE, there were skirmishes every day. But the Riffi had discovered that it was hard to break through the French lines, while the French waited for reenforcements before launching a drive. They could not risk a headlong attack which might have ended in disaster for lack of troops. The memory of Anoual, two years before, when the Spaniards had been defeated and humiliated, was fresh. As the situation stood, the French were still the losers, for the tribes from the Riff and the rebels held a zone from which the Europeans had been ejected. It was in this zone that the blockhouses were situated.

These tiny forts were within a few miles of the actual front, and planes flew over them daily. At night, when the sector was quiet, the Legionnaires could hear the sound of rifle fire from these blockhouses, see the rockets curve and bloom in the sky to shed their brief, dazzling radiance.

One night, a distant explosion shook

the earth. On the next day the troops learned that one of the blockhouses had blown up. The sub-lieutenant, a kid barely out of military school, had touched off a charge of cordite rather than yield. The simple heroism of a twenty-two year old officer stirred a feeling of mingled admiration and pity among the men.

Pierre himself wondered whether it would not have been preferable for him to have ended thus, at twenty-two, in a blast of glory. Better at any rate, he thought, than to have become what he was, to have done what he had done. At twenty-two, he knew, self-sacrifice without a shade of regret would have been possible to him. The words "France" and "Duty" had had meaning.

He pulled himself up short. He knew better now; he had lived and experienced. According to his beliefs, that youngster had done the right thing, had been uplifted, moved above fear by idealism. But what had prompted him was dead in Pierre.

He felt that he must leave this atmosphere of puerile enthusiasm. For many days now he had been steeped in childish sentiments, drowned in an ignorant mass of men who were willing to suffer and to die anonymously. It was time to react, to leave. Unless he checked himself, he would probably get himself killed like an idiot, like a twenty-five centimes a day Legionnaire or Tirailleur.

Could he, an adult, thinking man, retrogress to former beliefs? For four and a half years, he had seen men deceived into greater and greater effort, kidded into getting themselves killed off that others might live, and live in luxury.

The privates were eating their ten o'clock meal. Canned meats, doubtful vegetables. Those who had sold the stuff to the government dined in the best restaurants, rode in fine motor cars. The man who could belong to the second category and chose to remain with the first, was he not a fool?

Adjutant Frey had just been informed that he could not receive the Legion of Honor, after fifteen years of service. The scribes had noted, "Claims not valid. Motives insufficient." Yet, Abednour senior had worn the red ribbon, without ever having risked his greasy hide. Bukowski was waiting for a medal he had earned ten times over. Michelon received less pay than clerks in civilian life. Kerdavan, it was rumored, had been ruined by the War and his home had been sold to a foreigner.

Men to be admired, truly, but not imitated.

"France, duty, Legion," Pierre decided, "all poor wine from the same old barrel."

He would apply for medical examination immediately.

He found Leroy, who was said to know how to produce the needed symptoms. The old sergeant listened to his explanation, nodded.

"Kidney trouble is your dodge," he said. "And a bit of acute arthritis won't harm. I'll fix you something tonight, and in three days you'll be hobbling about like an old cab horse. I got the prescription from a German who had been a doctor back home and wanted to get sent back as too sick to serve. They reformed him No. 2, with partial compensation. And in two weeks after getting home, he was as well as ever. The beauty of the trick is that it can all be done with stuff that you have at hand. You take a lump of sugar—"

He was outlining his recipe when an orderly ran up to them, saluted.

"All noncoms are to report to the lieutenant, at the double. Important."

Leroy knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Probably about that looted truck," he stated. "They can't prove it on our company. The barrels were dumped near the Senegalese's camp. But I suppose we'll have to go through the whole business again. Coming along, Pierre?"

"Yes. We'll finish our conversation later."

But Pierre was wrong—the conversation was never finished.

CHAPTER IX

THE VOLUNTEERS

MICHELON waited until the noncoms of his section had filed into the shack. All saw at once that he had not called them on a trivial, routine matter. He stood watching them for some time, his head almost touching the ceiling, his thumbs hooked through the military belt, fingers twitching on the khaki cloth.

"I want to consult you before coming to a decision," he said at last.

"Lieutenant—" Schick stepped forward, self-appointed spokesman as usual—"there was no need to consult us. Whatever you decide binds us."

"Possibly, it was because I knew that that I called you." The officer cleared his throat, resumed. "You all know what happened last night. A blockhouse commander blew himself up. There are other outposts in the same danger. Can we remain here, safe, and watch them die while we have our arms folded?"

"We wait for orders," Schick said. "As soldiers, we can not comment on a general's actions."

"I know." Michelon nodded. "A rescue party had been planned for that outpost tonight. The decision came just a day late. It must not happen again. An effort is to be made tonight to reach another blockhouse, reported on the verge of disaster, and try to save the garrison. I do not need to indicate the difficulties and dangers of the job. The relief party must be small, very mobile, resolute."

"We understand, Lieutenant."

"From a cold reasoning, the undertaking is not practical." Michelon hesitated. "All understand that it may mean the throwing away of additional lives. Nevertheless, the staff has consented to venture a group tonight. A detachment will start at dark, to reach the Post of El Ayas by midnight. El Ayas is not far from our lines—you have seen its rockets every night.

"Time presses. Tomorrow might be too late. A sergeant got through to us today. I have seen him. He was in charge of a flanking tower, two miles from El Ayas. The natives took it last night, and he escaped, wounded. He has brought accurate reports of the main post, El Ayas proper. The garrison has been reduced to a handful after a siege of sixty-odd days. The wires are down, part of the wall crumbled. They have had no food for six days, no water for two. The Riffi have brought cannon before the place and have shelled it. With them, that always precedes a mass attack. By themselves, the defenders are doomed.

"At two o'clock this afternoon, a plane dropped a message into the post in answer to a distress signal. The garrison is thus informed that they will be helped tonight. A rocket has gone up to signify understanding. A promise has been made those men. That promise must be kept."

"Naturally, Lieutenant," Schick agreed for all.

"The general naturally thought of the Legion to do the job. He asked the major commanding our detached companies in this region to call for an officer to volunteer. Knowing that all would answer, the major decided to select a lieutenant according to past services. I had the honor to be nominated. I shall lead the detachment."

"Naturally," Schick repeated.

"I am instructed to call for volunteers in all the companies," Michelon went on. "I thought it best to ask you first. I know all of you well, and in private, you have no need to volunteer unless you wish to. Your bravery has been proved to me many times, and—"

This time, Schick consented to turn and consult the others with a glance. He was wholly satisfied, evidently, for he flushed a bit and replied—

"You need not seek out of the section, Lieutenant."

Michelon smiled, nodded.

"I'm allowed forty men. That means that the section is not to go as a whole, for with the reinforcements we are almost sixty. No man is compelled to go, and your choice will decide the successful candidates. The arms shall be carbine or automatic pistol for each man, and grenades. Those who do not have a solid, broad bladed knife, can obtain one. One canteen only, no food, save perhaps a few tablets of chocolate. Select only men with good wind and known as good marchers. Until the moment of our departure, no one in other units is to know. Now, I have here a map of the sector, and a few photographs taken by the aviation."

The noncoms gathered around the table, heads together, and followed the officer's indications.

"We cross the river at the ford. There are two ranges of hills between us and El Ayas. Here is a permanent encampment of the enemy, here another. The small hamlet here is occupied. We must get through without giving the alarm, if possible. Coming back, we have two lines of retreat. If we have attracted no attention, we return by the same trail. Otherwise we swing northeast and reach the river some distance upstream. There will be detachments to assist us if we reach the spot. In case of failure, there are no particular instructions. You men had best get some rest this afternoon. You may go."

Pierre was leaving with the others. Michelon called him back.

"I saw you nod to Schick," the lieutenant said. "While I realize that you could not do otherwise, you must see that there can be no question of your coming."

An instant before Michelon said that, Pierre had been calling himself a fool, the old arguments had run through his head. He had been somewhat amused, had noted with irony the unconsciously theatrical attitude of the adjutant. He saw that the lieutenant was sincere, that he wished to spare his, Pierre's, life. And somehow, this angered him, humiliated him.

"Why not, friend?"

MICHELON shuffled the photographs mechanically as he spoke.

"I've talked this over with the general. He did not hesitate to say frankly that we did not have more than one chance in a hundred of coming back. They are not fools, across the way, and they are aware that it is humiliating for us to stand by while they massacre our comrades, that we must try something. In fact, this will be in the nature of a willing sacrifice."

Pierre pointed at the map, bearing the heavy strokes of Michelon's pencils.

"You know, I gathered some idea like that without being told?"

"Well? You're not a Legionnaire, after all."

"Let's presume I feel like one," Pierre said stubbornly.

"I can't have you do it. Why should you?"

"Courtesy. I don't want those fellows to think they've sheltered a coward. Call it vanity, anything you like, Michelon, but there it is."

"They shall not judge you," the officer declared. "In any case, they shall be dead in all probability by morning. Their lives were forfeited to us when they enlisted. It's a bargain they're keeping."

"I received as much from the Legion as they did."

"No. Hospitality, nothing more."

"A guest?"

"That's it," Michelon accepted the word. "A guest. Don't you see how monstrous it would be for me to have saved you from a minor danger only to exact your life in payment?"

"The captain put it much better." Pierre reached for a cigaret on the table,

struck a match. "He termed me a 'guest of honor'. Honor? You may wonder that I have remembered the word. But the shreds of my integrity are sufficient to show me the way."

"You ass!" Michelon grasped Pierre with his powerful paws. "You can't risk it. For my sake, give it up. It's your life you're throwing away. Each one to his job. Mine is to do this sort of thing. Yours is—"

"You're being offensive," Pierre pointed out, "when you mention my chosen trade. And mark that you are forcing me to heroic speeches against my wishes."

"But what will I think of myself, if you are killed?"

"You'll be spared remorse. You'll be dead."

Pierre's face was drenched with sweat. It was hard for him to argue against himself, and for the moment, he felt fear. But he could not see Michelon go off to die, see those who had befriended him follow. If he remained behind, it was the last surrender. He would have lost even his soldier's integrity. And his answers rested his self-respect, and they would prove whether Michelon had helped Pierre Mercadier, crook, or a former captain.

"Know what I'll do?" Michelon asked.

"Be a good chap and drop it," Pierre said.

"I'll turn you down." The lieutenant grinned with relief. "Turn you down as unfit physically. You fainted on the march, that first day. Everybody will understand that I can not run that risk again, when each man counts."

"You wouldn't do that, friend."

"You'll see." Michelon patted Pierre's shoulder. "I have to. I can't take your life in payment for a favor. You'll get out of Morocco, some way, and you'll soon think Michelon was right."

Captain Kerdavan entered, closed the door. Michelon and Pierre presented the problem to him.

"You want to go—er—Zajac?"

"I do, Captain. You should understand."

"Uhm. Bad business, tonight. Personally, sorry see you go. Had plans for you. Important. Not correct mention them now." Kerdavan fired his phrases rapidly. "Proper thing to do. Ready to die with friend. Michelon says you're guest. You say you're guest. Proper you should stick with him. Proper he should refuse. Both gentlemen. Both fools."

"He's not a Legionnaire, Captain," Michelon protested.

"No. He says he is a crook. You say he is not. You say take him into Legion. Riddles, riddles all the time. What is he? Got a citation. Makes him Legionnaire. Zajac, if you want to go, go."

"Thank you, Captain."

"Captain!" the lieutenant pleaded.

"I'm captain, you're lieutenant. You have nothing to say. You—smart officer, Michelon; damn fool, too. You ask my advice. I'm a soldier, Michelon, not a chaplain."

CHAPTER X

EL AYAS

THE moon was masked by thick clouds.

Despite all precautions, hobnailed boots scraped against stones, rustled through dry grass; pebbles trickled down into the velvety darkness of the ravine. But a dim, sinister radiance filtered through upon the slope, sufficiently strong to show the silhouettes of the Legionnaires, the unmistakable outline of the *képis*.

The detachment had forded the river at ten-thirty o'clock, broken contact with the supporting battalion that was to await on the French bank. It was scheduled to reach El Ayas by midnight. But Pierre knew that two hours at least had elapsed, that they were late. Out there, somewhere, men were peering anxiously into the night, waiting for the rescuers that did not come.

The Legionnaires had not been challenged, had encountered no one on the way. Yet Pierre felt that their presence was known to the natives; the night exhaled a sensation of hostility of danger, of wakeful, alert foes.

"Pst!" Michelon signaled.

He was in the lead with the native guide supplied by the intelligence service. The almost imperceptible hiss was obeyed; the men came to a stop without confusion. Four figures crept forward noiselessly, grouped about the officer and the native. The lieutenant held out his arm so that all might see the luminous dial of his watch.

"One-thirty. I recognize the contours of the hill on which El Ayas is situated." His voice was low, calm, almost serene. "This chap wishes to circle farther to seek an unguarded spot. In my opinion, such a spot does not exist. We must chance it sooner or later and we are already late. We make straight for the post now."

"They know we're near," Schick whispered. "Otherwise, why have they left the post alone all this time? Usually, there's fighting all night. And we haven't heard a shot."

"Many men ahead," the guide warned.

"Your job's done," Michelon told him. "You may beat it."

"I was paid to take you to El Ayas," the other replied.

Michelon chuckled, amused or pleased by this professional honesty. He clicked his tongue, and all started forward once more. Before long, without another order being given, they had broken into a trot. El Ayas could not be more than five hundred meters away, and they were eager to arrive.

For several seconds, nothing was heard but the panting of the runners and the pounding of their boots. Then a hundred flashes blinked like giant fireflies, dead ahead, and the silence was ripped by a first volley. At the same time, a sort of stupendous clamor arose, swelled, ending in a shriek of defiance.

"En avant, la Légion!"

Michelon had answered with the traditional cry of the corps.

Pierre reached into one of his bags, primed a grenade. It was neither possible nor needed to aim carefully. Men had risen from concealment in such numbers that their light colored garments formed a distinct barrier in the darkness. The explosion of the first grenade revealed a moving swarm of turbaned skulls. The missiles could not strike the ground, burst shoulder high.

From that moment, Pierre had no more precise knowledge of what happened to him than a man caught in a tidal wave. He had time to throw another grenade, then hands clawed at his arms, at his face. He emptied his automatic pistol at random. In the brief glare of the explosions, he had glimpses of swarthy faces surrounding him, saw his companions as hard pressed as himself.

Michelon had a leather quirt weighed with lead, which he plied so vigorously that its impacts could be heard through the din. Pierre fell or stumbled many times; once his mouth filled with smelly hair as his teeth closed desperately in a man's cheek. He tumbled this way and that, recovered his balance. In some manner he had drawn the trench knife issued him, and was using it freely.

"This way, this way!" Michelon shouted at intervals.

Those who could obey him, followed up the slope. The Moroccans were everywhere now, not only in front, but behind. A rocket fused into the air, curved gracefully and shed its unearthly, dazzling glow before dying out in a shower of red sparks. It had been fired by the outpost's defenders as the Legionnaires reached what was left of the wire entanglements.

While the majority of the soldiers turned to open fire and keep the natives off, Pierre kept on behind Michelon, who ran straight to the little group —less than a score—formed by the survivors of the garrison.

THEY were Senegalese soldiers, negroes, with only one white man, the young lieutenant who had led them during the siege. Michelon placed the quirt under one arm, held out both hands in greeting. The other grasped them warmly, then threw his arms about the Legionnaire, pressed his cheeks with his own.

"Thank you, friend."

"At your service," Michelon answered mechanically. Then he laughed at himself and added, "Sorry we were late, old man—we got lost."

Pierre could hear every word plainly, for both had raised their voices.

"This dump is going up any time now," the Tirailleur officer warned. "We had better clear out."

"Not much better out there," Michelon shouted, indicating the natives who came on like a human flood. Then he saw, evidently, that it was the only thing to do and gave his orders. "Rally—form a square—garrison in the center! Form a square!"

The negro soldiers grinned jubilantly, cackling with excitement. They were thin, in rags, but stood together resolutely, the wounded inside their bristling bayonets. The remaining Legionnaires surrounded them. Pierre saw that Bukowski's face had been slashed. The Russian appeared to smile, as his teeth had been bared by the cut, and a rag of bleeding flesh hung below his chin. Schick was all but nude, for while his leather equipment had held, all the cloth had been left in the clutches of his assailants.

There was neither light nor darkness, but an insane flickering as the explosions of the grenades and the flame spurts of the rifles thudded and cracked continuously.

Pierre located his pistol, which he had slipped inside his trousers, down against his knee. He ripped the cloth with his knife, and dodged behind the first rank to insert a clip in the magazine.

He glanced about rapidly, seeking Kruysanker and Leroy. But he did not see see them, and judged that they had fallen during the initial rush.

The solid square of men had no sooner left the wires behind than the Moroccans closed in. And from then on, it seemed as if the French troopers were dragging the enormous, overwhelming mass of their foes down the slope. Once a gun was empty, it was impossible to reload. The grenade explosions were decreasing. The Legionnaires had used theirs, and on this occasion, none was thrown by the enemy.

Pierre used the automatic pistol as a club, striking with the barrel. Whether he hit or was hit was a matter of pure luck, and the odds favored him, for anywhere he swung, he could strike a foe, while the Riffi had to watch out one for the others. The blacks stabbed with their long bayonets, the slim blades darting from behind the Legionnaires with queer, snake-like motions—puncturing a face here, piercing a chest there. The tribesmen crouched low and tried to grasp the ankles of the front rank men. When they succeeded, the victim was hauled away and finished by the howling mob.

"Snap it up, come on!" Michelon kept urging.

But it was impossible for the square to progress faster through the mass of warriors. Its drive was slow, persistent, like that of a red hot iron through an oak plank.

Pierre's face was wet, he tasted blood on his lips. He did not know whether it was his own or not. He had received heavy blows on the head, was growing dizzy. One of the negroes was gibbering in broken French,

"Me—kill them—me kill them—all time kill them!"

There were several heavy explosions up the hill. Like the rest, Pierre was but dimly aware that the post had blown up. But the rain of stones and dirt brought about a short truce. There was time to reload, time to reorganize the square. Adjutant Schick appeared,

pressed a carbine into Pierre's hands.

"Loaded," he announced.

He had a weapon of his own, and fought in the front rank when the natives recovered and attacked again. But only for a few seconds. Suddenly, he fell forward and Pierre caught his belt from behind. A dozen natives caught at the Prussian's extended arms, at his shoulders, at his ears. They dragged him away.

"Help—help!" Pierre shouted, foolishly—for there was no one free to help him.

A gun butt crashed down on Schick's skull, and Pierre released him to defend his own life. The adjutant was left behind. Fortunately, the nearest of the assailants were in the same plight as the Legionnaires, had neither room nor opportunity to reload their guns. Those behind them, jostled and excited, generally discharged their weapons too high.

"Hold together!" Michelon called.

Battered at from every angle, the square was beginning to break up. Bukowski reappeared at Pierre's side, armed with the bayoneted rifle of a disabled black. Tunic, shirt, trousers had been ripped off, he seemed to wear red gauntlets and his muscular arms and shoulders were flecked with blood. He recognized Pierre and had the courage to laugh despite his mangled face.

"Queer night," he said, distinctly.

That was the last Pierre ever recalled of him. The square had cracked at last, and was split up into several smaller groups, which formed so many islets of resistance in the flood of crazed natives. Pierre was knocked down, rolled over and over, shielding his face with one arm, his throat with the other. For a moment, he lay very still, too weary to move, awaiting the merciful stroke.

When nothing happened, he rose, and was whirled away with a band of screaming warriors. They jostled him, pushed him this side and that, as they milled in the darkness as confused as he was, darting off toward the sound of firing.

Pierre knew that he was safe only so long as he kept away from lights. To plunge back into the fighting would be sheer madness, he decided. The expedition had reached the expected end.

He could hear Michelon's voice at rare intervals, and hovered on the fringe of the combat, waiting for an opportunity to reach his friend's side. But whenever he started in one direction, the lieutenant would call from that opposite. The attack naturally centered upon the officer, and his group was being buffeted constantly.

Shots were infrequent now. A few cries still rose, but the battle was over. As the Legionnaires and Tirailleurs had been outnumbered fifty to one, they had done well to keep on so long.

So long—Pierre looked up and was surprised to find the sky as dark as before. What had seemed an eternity, from the first shot to the last, including the junction with the garrison, had lasted probably less than ten minutes.

He was alone—and still alive.

CHAPTER XI

SPIRIT OF THE LEGION

THE brook was perhaps three feet wide, not much more than a foot in depth. But the rapid flow was limpid, cool, like thick crystal moving over the bed of colored pebbles.

Pierre sprawled in the tall reeds growing from the moist stretches along the bank. He had drunk until he could not swallow another drop. His stomach was dilated, and a great peace had flooded his weary body. He had hidden in the loose rocks in this gully a long time before daring to crawl to the little stream.

Now he was unwilling to leave, although he knew that it would be safer. But he had nothing in which to carry away a provision, he had known thirst and dreaded to suffer again. For sev-

eral hours after daylight, the natives had combed the field of battle for loot. Women and children had joined the fighters, and until afternoon he had been in constant fear of discovery.

They had all gone away at last, and there was no sound save the slight noises made by small animals, the call of crows, and the remote vibration of rifle fire near the French lines. The lines —Pierre would undertake to reach them tonight. The distance was not great—twelve to fifteen kilometers at most—and a single man had an excellent chance.

"I should hide until dark," he thought.

Instead, he plunged his naked arms below the surface, ducked his head repeatedly, laughing as the water trickled from his hair down his face. The strong sun struck his bare body, for he had no garments left save his boots, rolled puttees and the leather beltings.

He was weak from loss of blood; his scalp had been gashed, and there were several nasty slashes along his ribs. One of them was rather deep, and should have been stitched, for it oozed a pale, pinkish fluid when he pressed the lips of the cut together.

On the whole, however, he might esteem himself lucky to be alive. He wondered to find himself alone, in this silent spot, after the tumult of the last hours. The others were dead, all dead. Even Michelon, brave old Michelon, had dropped. Probably his head had been in one of the lumpy, moist bags he had seen loaded on mules and led away in triumph.

"Queer night," Bukowski had put it rightly. It had been a queer night. Pierre had known terror when under bombardment, something akin to panic during hand to hand fighting in the trenches. But nothing had approached the horror of that charge downhill, with the breaking square, when all hope had gone.

When Pierre closed his eyes, he could relive the scenes. The meeting of Michelon and the garrison commander, the face of Schick just before the end. In his ears rang the chattering of the negro soldier in a confusion of screams.

"Zajac—"

The name whispered through his brain. It was natural: his last name, the name under which such fine fellows had known him, the men who were dead now. Pierre was the sole survivor once again. As Captain Kerdavan had said of his citation, it was a habit. Luck, luck—

"Zajac!"

The whisper was so clear, so material, that he started. Then he smiled in self-derision. His nerves were snapping; he was feverish from his wounds. He moved his arms slowly in the water.

"Pierre!"

This time, he looked up, bewildered, his eyes searching the thick reeds on the banks. Some one had uttered his name, his real name, very near. And he knew the voice. He fought down a chill of dread. Fever—he was a sane man otherwise; there were no ghosts.

"This way—"

The grass parted, fifteen feet upstream on the opposite bank. A head appeared, and Pierre gaped speechlessly as he recognized Kruysanker, the Belgian.

"Hello, there! No one's in sight, they've all gone away. Come on across." The Legionnaire grinned. "I've been watching you since you first came down to this water. Wish I could have taken a movie of your actions!"

"I was thirsty—"

"You're a great sight. Get over here."

"You come on over," Pierre urged.

"Can't. Got to get back to the others soon."

Pierre looked in all directions, darted across and slid swiftly beside Kruysanker. The Belgian rolled aside to make room. He wore belt and boots, but no puttees. A dressing made of khaki strips circled his chest. His neck, shoulders and arms were cut and bruised.

"How many are there left?" Pierre asked him.

"Four, five with you. The lieutenant and two privates. Eh, did you ever see such fiends? I wouldn't have given five centimes for my hide."

"Which lieutenant? Michelon or the Tirailleur?"

"Our lieutenant, of course." Kruysanker mused, "Looks like we're all right for a space. When they got through picking stuff, they cut off the heads and took them off. Big celebration in the hills by now. Too happy to search for survivors."

"How did you escape?"

"You fell into this gully, didn't you? So did I. You know, I got wounded during the first rush, when they jumped out like a thousand mad camels. They were chasing the rest to the wires when I picked myself up and I crawled around. Finally, I hit this gully—that's where the river that gets to be this brook cuts through when there's a flood.

"I lay very quiet in the grass until I got so thirsty that I chanced crawling to this place. There was a guy here, already, filling a canteen. I knew him by sight—Ben Hadj of Group 1. He told me that he had got the lieutenant safe, but pretty badly banged up, and was getting water for him. I went back with him, and found the boss with another private: Heuptli, a German in Leroy's group. The lieutenant drinks a lot, so somebody had to get more water and I was him. Then you came along, and started playing seal."

"Is Michelon hurt badly?"

"He's bad, all right." Kruysanker bent to take a long, lingering drink and Pierre followed suit. "Come on, we got to get back."

"Couldn't we wait until dark?" Pierre hesitated.

"Oh, it's not far. And I'm afraid the lieutenant'll get loose on them. We've had an awful time with him."

The Legionnaire led the way. Once out of the bushes, he did not try to hide, deeming speed the best factor. Once or twice he spat blood as he ran.

"That's a bad sign," he told Pierre casually.

Kruysanker either lacked imagination or possessed a truly marvelous nervous system. He made the best of the situation and did not appear to have a worry in the world. Yet Pierre saw fresh blood dripping on his flank from beneath the soiled dressing.

THEY came to a part of the gully strewn with enormous boulders, torn from the banks during a flood. Between these grayish masses of stone, the sergeant led the way without hesitation, and after announcing himself with a low whistle, pushed Pierre into a sort of natural alcove between the bank and a gigantic rock.

"Reenforcements," he said.

Two Legionnaires were seated on either side of Michelon, who was stretched out full length on the grass. Pierre saw with astonishment that his wrists and ankles were tied with khaki strips. The top of his head, to the tip of the nose, was wrapped in an enormous khaki bandage. This explained why all these men showed bare shins. The lower part of the officer's face was livid, bruised.

Pierre recognized the first of the privates, a stocky soldier with swarthy skin and dark eyes, as Mohammed ben Hadj. He was a Moroccan but had been in the Legion since 1915, when he had transferred from the First Moroccan Colonial to the Legion March Regiment, in the same brigade. He had reenlisted after the Armistice. He had acquired army French to perfection, and he, who bore the name of the Prophet, was one of the notorious drunkards of the company.

The other, Gottlieb Heuptli, was a tall, shy German, pink and blond, who could not have been more than nineteen years old. Pierre greeted them, but did not speak to Michelon, whom he believed asleep as he had not stirred at their arrival.

"Did he behave himself?" Kruysanker asked.

"He didn't try to break loose again," Heuptli said. "But he asked us to let him kill himself, all the time."

"Why?" Pierre asked.

"Ask him," Heuptli replied, shortly.

"Is he awake?" Pierre knelt beside Michelon and pressed his hands with both his own. "What's the matter? This is Pierre. Don't worry, friend, we'll get you out of this."

"You'll understand," Michelon spoke slowly, "you'll understand. For the love of God, have those yokels free me and hand me a gun."

The others stared away, shaking their heads.

"What's the matter?" Pierre insisted.

"I'm blind—I'm blind!" Michelon cried.

Heuptli dropped his palm upon his mouth.

"Not so loud, lieutenant."

"Blind?" Pierre could only repeat the word. "Blind?"

"He got two bullets in the head," Heuptli stated. "I think that the shock temporarily paralyzed his optic nerves. Traumatic, is that the word? The same thing that brought the blood into his face."

"Heuptli was a doctor," Kruysanker indicated proudly.

"Only a student," the young German protested. He spoke excellent French, learned in school rather than in the ranks. "The eyes are untouched. I did the best I could with what I had. I chewed leaves and applied them over the wounds. Saliva is claimed to possess healing qualities."

"You're talking, it has," Mohammed put in.

"You heard? Your eyes are all right," Pierre said, motioning for Heuptli to lift his hand so that the officer might speak.

"Why won't he let me feel and *see* if my eyes are still there," Michelon pleaded.

"With dirty fingers?" Heuptli was shocked.

Kruysanker knelt, placed the spout of the full canteen between the officer's lips.

"Have a nice drink, Lieutenant. That'll be better than grumbling."

When the chief had drunk all he wished, the two others sipped sparingly. Kruysanker corked the container, laid it aside, in the shade.

"I see you have a pistol. Cartridges?"

"Eighteen left," Pierre replied.

"That means we have four pistols with seven shots apiece. Mohammed has his carbine and four cartridges. Three knives, a canteen and no food save a few tablets of chocolate, which are for the lieutenant. He needs nourishment."

"I wish you'd keep them for yourself and get rid of me," Michelon snarled. "Pierre, you know I won't live blind. It's useless torture to drag me around like this."

Kruysanker beckoned Pierre to come aside.

"Heuptli knows more than he looks like," he whispered, "and he thinks his sight will come back in a couple of days. But the minute we let him loose, he'll start again. We can't travel with him tied up the way he is. We can't leave him and we can't stay here. I don't like to see the dark side of things, but this is annoying."

"Leave me alone with him," Pierre suggested. "I'll have a talk and see if I can't calm him." When the others had stepped away, he addressed Michelon. "We're alone. Now, those boys won't abandon you, and they won't let you shoot yourself. So promise you'll behave and do as we say."

"But why go on?" Michelon's lips twisted. "I'm just a burden. You haven't a chance to escape with me along. You remember, years ago, that some of us swore to finish the guy unlucky enough to be too mangled to lead a normal life? That promise was kept, twice. You know who kept it when Sergeant Barbier had both hands and most of his face blown off by a grenade."

"This is Morocco. Your men can't abandon you, and you can't abandon them."

"You can lead them out better than I could even with my sight." Michelon gritted his teeth, exploded, "You think I'm a coward. But I can't go on, blind. Don't let me live to get used to it. God, don't—blind!"

"Blind or not," Pierre said, "it's your job to stick with your men until they're safe. And remember that a shot would bring the natives on them. I'll take off your bonds, and chance it."

He called back the Legionnaires, and Michelon was freed. At the same moment, an unexpected sound vibrated, and soon they saw an army plane passing overhead. But there was no use making their presence known. The man above could only report seeing them, which would perhaps prompt another foolhardy rescue. When the machine had vanished, they turned and found Michelon squatted on the ground, laughing queerly.

"You better make up your minds to lose me," he said. "I tried to stand, and my foot's broken. I can't walk a yard."

They removed his boots, and found his ankle swollen.

"Sprain," Heuptli decided gravely. "You see, we could not ease him down. We had to throw him and he probably landed wrong."

"Probably," Mohammed agreed with deep sarcasm.

Kruysanker met this new blow valiantly.

"We'll have to wait until the lieutenant is able to walk, that's all," he said. "Meanwhile, we'd better organize. First, we'll need water and food. We know where to get the water."

"You fools," Michelon grumbled.

"And there must be food somewhere."

"I'll go as soon as it's dark," Mohammed volunteered.

"You'll be caught."

"Insha Allah," Mohammed agreed piously—"but I hope I won't. I can find a *burnous* somewhere and have a look around. You see, Lieutenant, there's a lot of chances that I can pass for one of the slobs in the dark—seeing I am one myself."

CHAPTER XII

A SUMMARY COURT

MOHAMMED left an hour after sunset. The hours passed slowly. It was tedious to wait thus, with empty stomachs, forced to talk in whispers. For the sound of human voices travels far at night.

"Think he'll come back?" Pierre questioned Kruysanker.

"Mohammed? He always has come back."

"It would be so easy for him to escape alone," Pierre pointed out,—"and no one could blame him. Even if he thought he'd be accused later of quitting the lieutenant, he could keep away from the French, among his own people."

"He?" Kruysanker exclaimed. Then he dismissed the idea with a laugh. "Mohammed hates these slobs around here worse than we do. Before we came —I mean the French—his tribe always had some quarrel or other with both Riffi and Jebella. And then, he's a Legionnaire and loves his wine. You'll hear of a Legionnaire deserting when things are slow, but you'll never hear of one leaving friends in a bad hole."

"You're right, Kruysanker," said Michelon, who had hobbled near. "Our comrade here doesn't know much as yet. He's new." He added cautiously, "Don't tell Heuptli, but I felt under that bandage. My eyes are there! He may be right."

It was long after midnight that they heard the signal agreed upon, and Mohammed returned. Somewhere, somehow, he had found *burnous,* turban, sandals and a heavy stick with a metal handle. From a sack slung over one shoulder, he produced a dozen cakes of unleavened native bread, great chunks of dried dates, a large piece of roasted

mutton. He had procured also white *gandouras* for his companions.

"I've had my chow," he informed them. "So go to it. More where this came from. It's a shame to take it from the poor slobs. I have cigaret papers, tobacco and matches, too. We can smoke here."

They ate avidly, then relaxed and smoked. The boulders screened them from the sides, and the overhang of the bank masked them from above. Mohammed handed an object to Pierre for inspection.

"A knife?"

"A knife—a *flissa* from Mogador, no less. Wait until you can see it. Two edges, bone handle with silver trimmings."

"Where did you find it?" Pierre wondered.

Michelon joined in the laugh.

"Come on, Mohammed, tell us about it. You've earned a boasting spell."

"Well, there's two encampments midway between here and the river, the Ouergha, you know. I knew that around them there would be a lot of prowlers looking for a good chance to clean up on the side. So I just stretched out with my head under a bush, some distance away, and started to moan like a sick man. By and by, a fellow passed near, stopped to look in my direction. I thought right away, 'Here's my meat.'

"He came nearer and pushed me in the ribs with his stick. I said, 'In the name of Moulay Idris, beloved of Allah, I beg assistance for one who has been beaten by thieves and has fled from them.' He asked me if the robbers had indeed taken everything from me. And I told him they had stolen my garments, but forgotten a purse concealed in my belt. I could pay him well for help, I added. So he came near and said, 'Oh, fool—oh, twice a fool—verily, he who informs a stranger that he has a full purse, on a lonely road and at night, that one is bereft of all sense and does not deserve pity. Yield the purse without struggle, or I finish the thieves' good work.' He placed his stick across my throat and reached for my belt. My hands closed about his gullet. He had a purse, this knife, this stick, and good garments. Once equipped, the rest was easy."

"There'll be a search for the murderer," Pierre declared.

"No. Dead men found near the camps are known to be thieves."

The meal had comforted them all. Michelon was almost cheerful, consented to discuss plans. Kruysanker, taken aside by Mohammed for a few minutes, came back to the lieutenant and Pierre.

"Mohammed has a good idea. But it is an idea for Moroccans. There must be killing, perhaps killing of innocent people. I'll explain."

It was first made clear that all European ideas of warfare should be discarded. Although the Riffi had outposts near the lines, natives were allowed to roam at will inside their zone. They were never questioned unless they aroused suspicions. Traffic on the trails was constant, as many of the warriors visited their homes not far away, and their women returned the visits.

TONIGHT, Mohammed had passed many groups of travelers, persons whom no one had halted. These people often had horses, mules or donkeys. The Legionnaires could ambush one of these groups, capture the animals. With the lieutenant mounted on a horse, a mule or even a donkey, surrounded by the rest disguised as natives, with Mohammed to answer casual greetings, all could reach the bank of the Ouergha. There they could make a rush for the water, wade or swim across, with no greater risk than scattered rifle shots from sentries.

This plan was tempting, for it would be quite a long time before the lieutenant would be able to walk many kilometers without danger of collapse.

"We'll try it tomorrow at dusk," Pierre decided.

"It would be best," Mohammed suggested, "to capture the animals at dawn. We then would have an entire day for them to become accustomed to us. Often, a strange master worries an animal. Oh, we can keep them near here all day long—the slobs will not be suspicious, but be content to think that some of their men have decided to camp for the day."

"Could we keep the owners quiet a whole day?" Pierre objected.

"A whole day or forever, what matters?" Mohammed shrugged. "It is our lives or theirs. Even if they be women, have no pity—have you never seen our dead after the females get through with the bodies?"

Pierre admitted that killing would be justified. There was Michelon to be saved, and three others besides himself.

Mohammed awoke him before dawn, and the expedition started. Kruysanker, who was racked by fever and spat blood oftener, remained with the lieutenant. Before daylight, Pierre, Mohammed and the young German were concealed in the tall grass within thirty feet of a trail.

The first group that passed them was composed of a youth riding a mule and of three women perched on already laden donkeys. But there were four small children, ranging between six and eight, trotting near them. Pierre decided to wait for a better opportunity, for even the ruthless Mohammed could not have hoped to slaughter eight persons without long pursuit and much screaming.

Next came an old fellow with a long, white beard, sleeping atop his mule, followed by a young man on foot, who carried an umbrella under one arm and a book in his hand.

"Not these," Mohammed warned. "*Marabout.*"

Pierre glanced at the private and could not guess whether the Moroccan Legionnaire entertained a lingering respect for preachers of his faith or simply feared that the venerable holy man was expected and would be sought for. He turned toward the road again.

Within a few minutes, hoofs clicked nearer, from the opposite direction—a group returning from the front. Two riders came in sight, the first mounted on a beautiful black horse, wrapped in a shimmering, silken cloak. A carbine hung by its strap from the ornamented pommel of the saddle. He was obese, and did not appear very alert. The second man, mounted on a gray mule, was a lean, bearded, half nude warrior, who carried a Spanish Mauser rifle slung across his back.

"No shooting unless they start it," Pierre whispered over his shoulder. "I'll attend to the first. You take care of the other."

The man on the black horse appeared to be an important man. Pierre immediately thought he might be worth more alive than dead, as a hostage. When the two were but ten feet away, Pierre leaped to his feet and ran toward the path, pistol high. Mohammed and Heuptli made for the servant.

"*Oukef!*" Pierre ordered. "*Fissa!*"

The fat rider obeyed both commands—he halted and he halted quickly. He raised his hands away from the butt of the carbine. But he remained perfectly calm of face, even smiled after a first startled twist of the lips. Pierre could cover him and see the Legionnaires behind him handling the second man. There, also, the struggle was brief. Heuptli had grasped the fellow's hands, while Mohammed threw a rope around his neck and twisted.

Then the two soldiers carried the body aside, to hide it in the grass.

"Let Heuptli strip him," Pierre ordered in French, "and come here to disarm this guy and make him understand that he's safe as long as we are."

The rider, his hands still held high, replied in French.

"*Kamerad, messieurs!* I shall not resist."

Mohammed took the carbine, opened the captive's cloak to remove a long barreled automatic from his sash. Pierre

now knew he was dealing with a European and derived a certain comfort from the knowledge. Even in the event of capture, such a chap, probably a trained officer, would not allow the Legionnaires to be massacred in cold blood.

"Let's beat it," Mohammed prompted.

"All right," Pierre agreed. "You—on the horse—I shoot straight and quickly. Follow my instructions at once, for I shall not repeat myself. Turn to the right, at a walk."

THE prisoner did as directed. He evidently understood what was expected of him, for he had dropped his hands to the bridle and appeared quite calm. Pierre lowered his gun and walked at his side, while Heuptli rode behind them on the captured mule and Mohammed closed the procession.

There was a moment of tenseness when a new group of horsemen trotted by on the road. Evidently there was nothing to attract their attention at a distance to the little band formed by the Legionnaires and their captive. The riders disappeared.

The prisoner spoke again, without turning.

"You are French soldiers?"

"Yes."

"Probably escaped from the combat the other night? That was to be expected. I urged those fools to search the vicinity of El Ayas for survivors. But they were sure they had killed you all. One can not instil military discipline into these people, no matter how hard one tries."

"You're serving the Riffi?"

"Yes. I might be called a staff officer," the prisoner stated impressively. "My situation among them corresponds to that of a lieutenant-colonel in your army. So you see that it is to your interest to surrender to me instead of keeping up this valiant but somewhat mad venture of yours. I promise to save your lives."

"Thank you."

"There are French prisoners held in the Riff, and many Spaniards." The man dropped his words with increasing confidence. He used the terse tone employed by officers to inferiors when on duty. "What units do you fellows belong to?"

"Foreign Legion."

"Are you a Frenchman?"

"I enlisted as an Austrian."

"Then why not take service with us? Oh, not necessarily fighting. Foreman in an ammunition factory or on a telephone line. But where are you taking me?"

"To our chief."

"An officer?"

"A lieutenant."

"Wait a moment," the rider said, slowing his horse.

"Keep going," Pierre ordered. "You can talk as much as you like, but keep going."

"I simply wished to say that we had better make our agreement now," the other declared, obeying. "Your lieutenant is very likely a Frenchman. Further, as an officer, he can not well surrender until forced to. If you men wish, I'll promise to save him also. But from what I have heard of the Legion, that's unlikely."

"Oh, you know the Legion?" Pierre asked mildly.

"Rather well. We have deserters from the corps in our service."

"That's what the Legion's often judged by—the yarns of deserters—" Pierre broke off. "We've arrived. Dismount. Mohammed, take care of the horse."

The prisoner hesitated.

"I know better, really. But I was offering to remove a witness that may prove embarrassing in the future."

"Thanks," Pierre repeated calmly. "Now, go on."

"Your fidelity is honorable," the other complimented.

"Hide those animals and join the group, Mohammed. You—turn as I tell you."

They reached the hiding place of the lieutenant. Kruysanker rose, gaped, stood uncertainly.

"Take this chap's turban cords and tie his wrists," Pierre ordered. "It's settled, Michelon. We start tonight. I brought back a prisoner which will make it rather safer than we expected."

"All right," Michelon replied, without rising.

The prisoner turned toward Pierre with some surprise. The informal talk between the Legionnaires puzzled him.

"You are in command, after all?"

"Temporarily," Pierre admitted.

"Then—"

But Michelon sat up suddenly, fingered his bandage.

"Who speaks French? Who's he?"

"I was about to question him, Lieutenant."

"Do so."

The prisoner, who seemed perfectly at ease, shrugged and sat down on a rock nearby. Kruysanker had found cigarets in his pocket, matches, and all were soon smoking, the sergeant having served Michelon, the prisoner, Pierre and himself in order.

They formed a calm little group, comfortably installed in the shade thrown by the embankment.

"What is your name?" Pierre asked.

"It doesn't matter," the prisoner declared. "It would convey no information. But for the purpose of identification, you may have heard of me as El Kasi."

If he expected to arouse interest, he was satisfied. Michelon and Kruysanker both started. Pierre himself had heard that name often.

"I shall continue the conversation," the lieutenant said, quietly. "But first —Kruysanker, is this fellow wearing a uniform?"

"I wouldn't call it a uniform, Lieutenant."

"May I remind you, Lieutenant," El Kasi pointed out, "that there is no particular uniform worn by the soldiers of the Riff?"

"The regulars are dressed in black."

"But the chiefs—"

"You are a foreign agent operating against us," Michelon broke in sharply. "What nation do you work for?"

"Nation?" El Kasi laughed softly. "You Frenchmen are incurably romantic. The Riff uprising is a business undertaking. Meant for a rearrangement of privileges and mining concessions when we have obtained what we seek."

"Independence?" Michelon asked.

"Economic independence at least."

"You have been in this region quite awhile, El Kasi?"

"Yes, I have."

"Therefore, at the start of hostilities in this zone, it was you who killed Lieutenant Belair of the Native Bureau, when he was captured by traitors and brought before you? If I heard rightly, you slapped his face, then shot him dead in cold blood."

"Belair had considerable prestige," El Kasi declared. "I could not allow him to live—he knew the tribes too well, would have won them back. Even those who betrayed him were afraid to touch him. You will understand that I was forced to demonstrate that the sky would not cave in should the famous Belair be insulted—or slain. A painful necessity, but a necessity."

"You admit it was you?"

"Why should I try to deny it? It's well known."

"And you allowed six of our men, taken in an isolated post, to be butchered before your eyes, without lifting a finger to prevent it—" Michelon spoke almost in a whisper—"when a word from you would have saved them?"

"This is Morocco, not Europe," El Kasi replied. "Pity is mistaken for weakness or fear."

"The *de facto* government of the Riff is not recognized," Michelon resumed. "Nevertheless, have you a commission to show me?"

"No, Lieutenant."

"You are therefore a guerilla leader, captured arms in hand, not wearing dis-

tinctive insigna of your standing. In other words, a *franc-tireur.*"

"Absolutely, Lieutenant."

"You know the penalty?"

"Death," El Kasi stated steadily.

"Have you anything to add before the sentence is carried out?"

PIERRE stared at his friend, amazed by his strange calm. Michelon had recovered his energy and there was no doubt that he was in earnest. But El Kasi turned to wink at the Legionnaires, for Heuptli and Mohammed had joined the group and were listening.

"Sentence? I have yet to be tried," he said.

"You have been tried. As commander of a detachment isolated from the main body of our troops, I have the power to judge you. You have confessed your activities against us. Had you evoked service to your native land, that would have been counted in your favor. But you said that you engaged in this conflict for profit—money. You have played a game, you have lost it. Death."

El Kasi laughed, pressing his heaving sides with both hands.

"You know the code. But I have offered life and safety to your men. I am ready to pay them well, even to forget your actions and save your life. Against a very problematic escape, I grant you my protection. If you fear long captivity, I'll negotiate an exchange."

"No."

"You are helpless, blind. Your rank no longer counts. With the possible exception of the man who captured me—he may be a Frenchman from his speech—your soldiers are foreigners. There is no moral obligation for them to obey you."

The lieutenant tried to stand, but slumped back with a gasp of pain. Kruysanker helped him to rise and sit again on a stone. The officer seemed unwilling to speak longer while prone. He formed a bizarre figure, with his face hooded to the lips, his torso nude, the stump of a cigaret between his large fingers.

"You have all heard what he said. Legionnaires, he is right. Your safety rests with him. I can do nothing for you save hinder your escape. If we succeed, I can not even reward you. I can not promise so much as a medal with the belief that it will be granted. According to my duty, I have condemned this man to death. I shall call out your names and you shall decide."

"This fellow—" Pierre started, stepping forward eagerly. He wanted to tell his comrades that El Kasi would not hesitate to break his word. But Michelon cut him short.

"Be still, Pierre. You did not enlist regularly, you are not a Legionnaire. You have no voice in this case. As a civilian, you may testify for the defense, but you can not accuse."

"All right, Lieutenant." Pierre stood back.

"El Kasi, or whatever your name may be, if a single man here wishes to accept your offer, you shall be free to take him away, to save him. No promise shall bind you to protect the rest by silence. You have my word on that."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Legionnaires, understand that the question is not whether this man should die or live. I have settled that. As I call your names, each one will answer whether he wants to chance escape with me or follow him. Understood?"

"Understood, Lieutenant."

"Sergeant Kruysanker?"

"You, Lieutenant."

"Legionnaire ben Hadj, Mohammed?"

"You, Lieutenant."

"Legionnaire Heuptli, Gottlieb?"

"Gottlieb," El Kasi said, "I am a German, like you."

Gottlieb Heuptli looked at the fat man, turned his loyal eyes on the lieutenant. Michelon mistook his hesitation as he could not see his face.

"Have no fear, Heuptli. Answer according to your heart."

"I'm a Legionnaire," Heuptli said,

white to the lips. "Now and always, you, Lieutenant."

"Mohammed," Michelon concluded placidly, "you execute the sentence."

Mohammed saluted, unsheathed his knife.

"I demand execution. This will be murder," El Kasi said.

"A shot would attract attention," Michelon said. "A painful necessity. Take him away, Mohammed."

"Come," the Legionnaire said, dropping his hand on El Kasi's shoulder.

The prisoner hesitated, then rose with hope flaming in his eyes. A Legion private alone, and a Moroccan at that—he could be bought off. El Kasi followed quietly; he did not know Mohammed.

CHAPTER XIII

BACK TO THE LINES

PIERRE halted, and as the horse jerked his head at the pull of his hand on the bridle, Michelon groaned. The lieutenant was suffering. The least jar sent sharp, throbbing pains through his aching head and the long ride had been a torture.

The night was still very dark, but the air had that undefinable tang that those who are accustomed to patrol know heralds the dawn. And daylight meant discovery; discovery meant death.

Pierre had become the virtual leader of the little band, felt the weight of responsibility. It had been so easy at first that his hopes had soared too high. Now, within sound of the French sentries, he and the others were still as far from complete safety as ever.

The march from their hiding place in the gully to the bank of the Ouergha River had been eventless. But since reaching the stream, difficulties had cropped up. They had found the known fords guarded by the Riffi with unusual care. The bold raid of the Legion in the attempt to save the garrison of the blockhouse at El Ayas had put them on the alert.

Pierre did not know the country, and Mohammed, although he had traveled in Northern Morocco as a boy, was not sure of landmarks. Heavy rains which had fallen recently in the hills had swollen the river in the space of a few hours into a rapid torrent. A crossing at random was almost certain to end in disaster. Before this impersonal foe, water, the iron will of the Legionnaires availed little.

And Pierre had to face what the text books called "deterioration of the human material". Michelon, as was to be expected, had been exhausted by his explosion of energy needed to dispose of the foreign agent. Pierre himself had been shaken by the scene, and the brief moment of suspense pending the answers of the men. It must have been an almost unbearable strain on the officer to gamble thus on the absolute loyalty of all.

Moreover, Michelon had lost much blood, could not see, and although a good swimmer, was unfitted to cope with the current alone. Pierre would have to swim at his side, to keep him in the saddle.

The mule had been turned loose, for she had refused to obey any one in the group, and her stentorian protests against a strange rider at night had almost brought them all to disaster. Legionnaire Heuptli, so brave in every other way, revealed a terror of water, confessed that he could not swim a stroke. He would have to ride behind the lieutenant.

Kruysanker was optimistic as ever, but half delirious from fever. There were moments when he seemed to forget the situation and threw caution to the four winds. Pierre was forced to shake him into silence twice during the march, to keep him from singing loudly. Despite his irritation, he felt pity when he touched the Belgian's burning flesh and realized his extreme weakness. Kruysanker swore he was a magnificent swimmer, but he was prone to exaggeration and it was to be feared that the

sudden impact of cold water would knock him out.

As for Mohammed, he was the ideal man. He was in his own surroundings, his years in the Legion had perfected his natural talents for emerging from scrapes. Pierre, who had a desperate plan, was about to address him when the horse neighed. At once, a voice challenged, some distance away—

"Ashkun temma?"

Mohammed replied in Arabic, mixing insults with inquiries so to allay suspicion. Several men answered at once, from all directions. This lasted two or three minutes, before the first speaker concluded:

"Balkum, elli kan! Look out, whoever you are! Guns shoot of themselves around here."

The group moved again and halted five hundred yards farther on.

"We must be near the river," Michelon muttered.

"We've been near it for hours," Pierre explained. "We're just nosing around for a good ford. Don't worry."

"Chance it anywhere."

"Can't. High waters. Can't you hear?"

"Sure. But why wait? If we must, we must."

"Yes—and some one will get frightened and yell," Pierre argued, with sarcasm in his tone. "The sentries on both sides will start popping in the dark, and all we'll have to do is fish out the drowning under fire."

"Tie us on the horse."

"And what if he tumbles over? Brilliant idea. Mohammed!"

"Sergeant—"

"We'll stick here while you swim across."

"I don't want to quit, Sergeant."

"Shut your mug and listen. It's not quitting. We can't get everybody across without help. You'll swim over, warn the French outposts. Take care you don't get shot getting into our lines."

"I'll duck the sentries and get to an officer first," Mohammed stated simply.

"That's the idea. Tell him we're here. As soon as his men are ready to swim out and help us, he can shoot a signal rocket and we'll start."

"Understood, Sergeant."

Mohammed wasted no time and vanished. But he was back an instant later, at Pierre's elbow.

"Say, how about answering challenges here?"

"We'll chance that," Pierre replied.

"I can speak Arabic, you know," Kruysanker put in.

"Don't let him answer, Sergeant," Mohammed protested. "He talks Arabic the way a cow talks Spanish. I better stay here with the bunch while you or somebody else swims across."

"Kruysanker's sick, the lieutenant's blind, Heuptli can't swim, and I am in charge and can't leave; you know that. Further, no one else could get through the sentries without being shot."

"Is it all right to leave my lieutenant?"

"Absolutely, Mohammed. You're obeying orders."

"See you later, Sergeant."

Mohammed disappeared again. He moved without a sound, and even Pierre, straining his ears, heard nothing more.

HALF an hour passed, and a violet mist quivered through the obscurity. An unreal, ghostly light crawled along the soil, through which the shadows of bushes and boulders could be discerned. Above the rushing waters of the Ouergha, the mist rose thicker, with a perceptible, amber shimmering.

"Dawn," Heuptli breathed.

"Mohammed must have arrived," Pierre replied.

But the expected rocket did not rise. Pierre refused to believe that the Legionnaire had failed. There had been no shots nearby. The detonations they heard at intervals came from sniping far off along the banks. Then he thought that the small group they formed on the river's edge would be

seen at once when day broke, and he ordered a move inland, toward a bushy area.

"Ashkun temma?"

Pierre halted short, grasped Kruysanker's arm in warning. No one must move, no one must answer. He had recognized the voice as that of the sentry who had challenged them a few minutes earlier.

The hail was repeated several times, then sandals pattered against the earth. The enemy was coming to investigate. In the stronger light, all distinguished a tall silhouette with a pointed hood. Behind this first man, others appeared—six or seven.

"Oukef!"

"No answer," Pierre advised. "Back toward the river. We may have to plunge in and risk it by ourselves."

A warning shot did not halt them.

Pierre ran beside the horse, holding on to the bridle. Then in the gray fog across the stream, a luminous streak cut high, bloomed into light: the rocket!

If the signal encouraged the fleeing men, it also ended the Riffi's hesitation. They had concluded, manifestly, that they had stumbled on a French patrol trying to return to the lines before dawn. The first missiles flew too high, but the marksmen corrected their aim and lead shrilled shoulder high.

"Hop on the horse, Heuptli!" Pierre cried.

Within fifty yards of the river, the animal was hit. He reared, lifting Pierre as the end of the bridle passed over one wrist, and bolted. Michelon and Heuptli thumped to the ground, and Pierre was dragged ten or fifteen yards before he could free his hand and run back.

Heuptli, armed with the Mauser carbine taken from El Kasi, knelt and emptied a magazine upon their pursuers. As men will in peril, Pierre from then on moved as in a dream, and his brain registered only a series of disconnected, hurried scenes. Kruysanker had hoisted the officer on his back, but fell under the burden.

"Beat it, Kruysanker—I'll handle him," Pierre snapped.

The Belgian trotted toward the river. Pierre grasped Michelon's arms, passed them over his shoulders. But the lieutenant was heavy, his legs dragged on the ground. Pierre had to stop to gain a better hold, to swing the legs high. And he staggered to the bank. Dawn comes swiftly in North Africa, and Kruysanker's back was visible. Bullets were fired at him by native guards further downstream, and the surface was flicked with spouts from the yellow flood.

"Get in, Heuptli!"

"What's the sense?" The young German shook his head. He had knelt again and was shoving a clip into the carbine. "I'll keep them off a few minutes from here and give you time to get the lieutenant where he belongs. In there, I'd only drown. Hurry, please, Sergeant!"

Pierre knew the young soldier was right. He could not save the two of them, and the choice was not left to him. A wounded man had first call. He dragged Michelon into the water, until they stood waist deep, with the current tugging at their legs.

"Put your hand on my shoulder," he ordered.

"You guide, I'll help a bit," Michelon said. Again, he was calm. Water did not frighten him and he knew better than to argue in an emergency.

Pierre plunged in, emerged, felt the officer's hand on his back, and struck out. His ears were filled with tumult, detonations slapped out above them. There was nothing for him to do save swim as hard as he could.

"Yah! Legionnaire!"

A black sphere broke the water two feet from his face, a ball punctured by rolling eyes and split in the middle by glistening white teeth. Other such spheres bobbed into view everywhere, laughing, shouting shrilly.

"Yah! Senegal savvy water—savvy water good!"

Dripping, muscular black arms reached for Michelon, grasped him, bore him away. One of the negro Tirailleurs tried to help Pierre.

"Come, Legionnaire—come!"

But the white man dodged, swam under water and turned toward the other side. With Michelon safe in the hands of the Senegalese, his duty as detachment commander, authorized or not, was to be at the point of danger as long as any of his men. He could not leave a living man behind.

The current had carried him downstream quite a distance, and he had difficulty getting his bearings. It was impossible to know whether Heuptli was still firing, as a hundred rifles rattled at once. A half nude white man slapped his back, and shouted at him.

"Get out of it, fellow—we've got him—"

"Heuptli? Heuptli?"

"The bird that was left behind—don't know his name."

"Fine! Let's go!"

They swam side by side, and the man shouted—

"What section you with?"

"Michelon—Lieutenant Michelon."

"Oh, you're one of them? The whole battalion's come down."

They crawled out of the water on the French side. The swimmer shook his hand, laughed. Some of the Legionnaires nearby addressed him as lieutenant. There were soldiers everywhere, a few completely clad, the majority bare of shins and torsoes, come hastily at the first alarm.

"Michelon's safe, fellow. What's your name?"

"Zajac—Sergeant Zajac," Pierre replied. "Did you get Kruysanker, the other noncom?"

Mohammed appeared.

"The blacks towed him in," he said.

"Where is he?"

But Captain Kerdavan replaced Mohammed. He was in slippers, shirt, and his braces hung down on his trousers.

"Ambulance, get to the ambulance! You're in the way here. The slobs are shooting. Attracting their attention. Ambulance!"

CHAPTER XIV

LEGIONNAIRE DE SARGES

DETECTIVE BOURQUIN evidently was aware that he was in a bad position. Asking Legion officers for the surrender of a returned Legionnaire of the El Ayas relief expedition was a hard task. Pierre rather pitied the policeman, despite his private reasons for not wishing him well.

Kerdavan glowered, and the two captains seated beside the major commanding the march battalion to form an officers' council, smiled with hurt irony. The big tent had been cleared of all witnesses save the principals in the case. But Pierre knew that his chief's sympathy, the sympathy of the soldiers, would avail nothing against the Law.

"Who are you?" the major asked.

Bourquin did not bare his head. He joined his heels and saluted, with a magnificent snap of his hand to the brim of his civilian hat.

"Agent Bourquin, Théophile, of the Oranese Sûreté. Ordered detached for the duration of the campaign to the security service of the armies in the field. Ex-sergeant in the 2nd Zouaves, and at your service, *mon Commandant*."

"Proceed."

"Three weeks ago, being on duty at the Camp of Souk el Trad, I recognized in this man, found standing in the military telegraph shack, Mercadier, Pierre, escaped from custody in Oran, a few months ago. I tried to start a conversation with him, but he struck me and left. Upon my query by wire, Oran advised me to seek him by sending circulars to the units in the field. There was no answer. I recognized him again, this morning, among the survivors of the affair at El Ayas."

"And decided to arrest him," Kerdavan snapped.

"Silence Captain," the major urged. "You, continue."

"Upon investigation following his escape from the police in Oran, Paris informed us that the judgment against him had lapsed, as it was a correctional case more than five years old. According to Article 636, Mercadier could no longer be held. We were further informed that he was needed as a witness against a former army officer in France, accused of appropriating government property while active."

"The major I struck?" Pierre asked.

"Silence, Zajac!" the Legion major snapped. "Proceed."

"The man struck by Mercadier, yes. Things will come out."

"In time." The major nodded. "But you ask for this man's arrest. Why?"

"Striking a police officer, Major."

"What is the penalty for that, Bourquin?"

"In view of the attenuating circumstances, and as I shall refuse to call myself 'civil party' to the trial, a fine and a few days in prison, Major. I don't like to arrest him, but my duty is clear."

"Drop the case, Bourquin," the major advised. "To cover you, we have agreed to draw up a statement concerning the man known to you as Mercadier. He has been cited for valor since the offense, and the Law of July 5th 1918 gives us a precedent to cling to. Your duty is discharged. Consider that we have the man in our custody."

"A favor, Major?" Bourquin insisted.

"Two if you like, as long as you don't grab my Legionnaires," the officer said, humorously.

"May I shake hands with him?"

"Granted."

"No grudge, eh?" Bourquin addressed Pierre.

"None. Thank you, my friend."

The detective faced the officers, saluted, left.

"Zajac, you came here from the hospital," the major resumed. "What's the latest news?"

"They say Lieutenant Michelon will recover his sight and be able to resume service, Major. Sergeant Kruysanker is badly wounded, but the doctor guarantees his recovery. Both were taken to Fez at three this afternoon by ambulance plane."

"And the others?"

"They have resumed service," Kerdavan said. "Major, might be better—settle with Zajac's case now. I told you about him, when he was thought lost. He's back. Irregular business, eh?"

"Seeing what he has done since—" the major smiled—"I don't believe we shall press charges against him or his protectors. Monsieur, you are at liberty to leave and reenter civilian life."

Pierre stepped forward.

"I should like to enlist legally, Major."

"As a private?"

"Yes, Major."

"Uhm! You were right, Kerdavan—" the major nodded to the captain. "We had arranged to keep you in the Legion with your actual ranking if you liked. You may leave for a month, to go to France and testify in the renewal of that old case. To obtain rehabilitation."

"I may do so at the end of this campaign, Major," Pierre replied. "With your permission. Meanwhile, I shall pursue my rehabilitation—in the Legion."

"In that case, as you are known to your officers and you have the requirements of an officer, you shall be a sub-lieutenant within four months."

"I was dishonorably discharged, Major."

"No matter. The Legion is not concerned with that. Do you wish to serve under your true name?"

"No, Major."

"Yes," Kerdavan broke in. "Good name. Good soldier."

"All right, Captain," Pierre accepted.

The major rose to indicate the interview at an end.

"Legionnaire de Sarges, you may go."

Pierre saluted and left.

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

FROM far off Poland comes a reader's letter propounding a few questions on Russian history:

Warsaw, Poland

In Mr. Harold Lamb's most interesting serial on the Crusades, recently published in *Adventure*, the author mentions the Varangian guard, a body of Scandinavians in Byzantine service, employed in defending and policing Constantinople.

Now, it is part of Russian history that the nucleus state around Kiev on the Dnieper, which was to develop into the enormous Russia of today, had been founded by sea rovers from the Baltic, called "Variagi." From certain rules of Russian etymology it is fairly certain that the name in its oldest form must have been "Varengi." This would point to the founders of Russia being perhaps none other than the Varangians of Byzantium.

IT IS very likely that Normans knew and followed what must have been an age-old trade route across Central Europe, connecting the Baltic with the Eastern Roman Empire. They probably rowed their boats across the Baltic into the estuary of and up the river Dvina, then hauled them across a short portage to the nearest tributary of the Dnieper, thence navigated downstream to the Black Sea and finally traveled along the seacoast down to Byzantium.

In their search for other overland routes to Southern Europe the Normans seem at one time also to have invaded my own country, Poland. Here, as on the Dnieper, they probably occupied and held convenient strongholds, commanding waterways. Recent research confirms this supposition and even points to a Scandinavian origin of Poland's early statehood.

IN VIEW of the most interesting possibilities which this subject opens, I would greatly appreciate the following information:

(1) What is the meaning of the word "Varangians"? Is it the name of a Scandinavian people or tribe, and if so, where did this people live? Has their name any connection with such places in Norway, as Varjag-Njarg and Veranger Fjord (a peninsula and bay on the Arctic Sea)?

(2) How did the Varangians usually reach Constantinople: by sea along the western and southern coasts of Europe or by a shorter overland route?

(3) What, in brief, was the origin, history and duration of the Varangian organization in Byzantium?

(4) Is any connection known to have existed between the Varangians of Constantinople and the founders of Russia? —EDWARD G. PIOTROWSKI

I took the liberty of passing on Mr. Piotrowski's letter to Natalie B. Sokoloff, some of whose colorful Russian tales have been recently appearing in our pages. As you may have guessed, Miss Sokoloff is deeply versed in the history of her native country Coming as she does from a long line of Cossack ancestors, her interest in the subject is easily understood.

Her reply, printed below, is at variance with the theory held by certain historians, but it does present the ideas generally accepted by Russian scholars at the present time:

Montvale, New Jersey

Both the "Variagi" of early Russian history and the "Varangian" guard of the Byzantine emperor were thought to be Scandinavians of the present-day meaning of the word; that is, Germanic people, Norsemen, and forefathers of Norwegians and Swedes.

Until some fifty years ago it was accepted as a fact that the northwestern limit of penetration of Slavic tribes was the south shore of the Baltic Sea. However, the research and excavations by Russians on the Allan Archipelago and other islands of the Baltic Sea gave definite indications that Slavs inhabited those islands until the end of 10th century. The excavations by German archeologists during the last five years (1925-1930) firmly established those indications as historical facts.

Till the middle of the 19th century the only source of the early Russian history were legends collected and written by the monk, Nestor. One of the legends describes an invitation in the 9th century extended by the citizens of Novgorod to companies of fighters called "Variagi" from "beyond the sea", under the leadership of three brothers—Rurik, Sineous and Trouvor; the elder brother, Rurik, to be their chief or *Kniaz*, a word used by Russians as a title, and for the lack of a better term, translated into English as "prince".

Before the above mentioned excavations and researches were carried out, it was assumed, without any confirmation, that the Variagi were Norsemen. But now we know that they were Slavs, leaders of mercenary companies of soldiers among whom there was an admixture of both Norsemen and Finns.

WRITTEN records of Byzantine history contain the descriptions of the Siege of Constantinople by Oleg, *Kniaz* of Kiev, who about 906 A.D. came with two thousand boats of forty men each, down the river Dnieper, and across the Black Sea. His horde of Slavs had an admixture of Norsemen and Finns, and some of his representatives, who negotiated a treaty with the Byzantine emperor, were Norsemen.

The treaty provided: the payment of a tribute to Kniaz Oleg for his withdrawal from Constantinople, free trade among Byzantines and Kiev, and the employment of a number of Oleg's soldiers, ostensibly as the emperor's guard but actually as a guarantee of the payment of tribute to Oleg.

Those soldiers of Kniaz Oleg were the "Varagian" guard of Constantinople.

After 912 A.D. the returning hordes of Khossars again invaded the southern steppes of Russia, and for about forty years cut off the direct communication between Kiev and the Byzantines. The Varangian guard had to remain at Constantinople until taken back by Olga, the reigning princess of Kiev, in 955 A.D., when she came to Constantinople to be baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church.

WE MAY now state that both Variagi of early Russia and Varangian guard of Constantinople were Slavic soldiers of Slavic princes. There was, or might have been, an admixture of Norsemen and Finns as mercenary soldiers; that the waterway from Baltic to the Black Sea by rivers Dvina, Volhov and Dnieper were explored and used not by the Norsemen, but by Slavs.

The discrepancy of spelling Variagi and Varangian is explained by the loss in the Russian language of nasal sound expressed in the old Slavic alphabet of Saint Cyril by the letter called *yoos*. It was pronounced like French "an", and is preserved in Polish as letters "ą" and "ią" with nasal sounds. The old Slavic word "Var-ia-g-i" is written in modern Russian with letter "ą" in the second syllable, but in the 10th century it had to be transcribed into Latin as "Varangi" to give a nasal sound to the second syllable.

The old Slavic word "Variagi" was a plural of a word meaning a fighter or a soldier, and its root was the same as the English word "war".

—NATALIE B. SOKOLOFF

H. BEDFORD-JONES sends on for Camp-fire the following word bearing on his novelette, "The Strong Hand Above," in this issue:

Los Angeles, California

It has been most interesting work to reconstruct this picture of life in Meknez under Ismail the Great. With the exception of O'Brien's duel, the incidents in the story are largely fact. Ismail, indeed, carried to his grave the scars of one combat with a lion. I have gathered into one story many incidents recounted by Sieur Mouette, who was a slave there for eleven years and knew him intimately.

The letter to James II still exists in the French archives; a photograph of the original is before me as I write. "By the great God," says Ismail, "I will not suffer that your house and realm should be in possession of a Hollander!"

Maddest and most shrewd of all Ismail's pranks was to fall ill for nearly two months, then to die—in order to get a rebellious son into his grip, when the resurrection was prompt and deadly. Commodore Steward, on embassy there, asked him pointblank why the people suffered his exactions and inordinate cruelty; whereat Ismail laughed. "If one carries a sack of rats," he responded, "one must keep shaking the sack—so that the rats can not gnaw their way out!" That was his whole domestic policy.

The shadow of Ismail is still upon Meknez, as I can bear witness; to one who knows of his life and reign, the city is vibrant with tongues. His tomb is walled with Delft tiles, made by a Dutch slave, and the palace of his English sultana is a school for cadets.

—H. BEDFORD-JONES

HOW ferocious is the swordfish? Here's another comrade who has watched one battle a sperm whale:

At sea, enroute Yokohama
to San Francisco

I obtained my first copy of *Adventure* from a passing vessel in Kobe harbor, Japan. During the course of reading I eventually came to the Camp-fire and read there the apparent controversy stirred by F. H. Sydney's article relating to the swordfish battle. It brought remembrance to me of a similar scene I viewed in the Bering Sea.

I was in Alaska with the U. S. Coast Guard Bering Sea Patrol, wet-nursing seals, natives, etc., when one day meeting an old acquaintance of mine at Akatan (whaling station), I accepted an invitation to go whaling a-là-modern. Obtaining leave of absence, I made a voyage I'll likely never forget. To make the story short, we saw a great commotion about a mile off. Veering our course, we came upon a peculiar sight (and, I was told, a man might travel the ocean all his life and never see again, if at all). A sperm whale was traveling through the water at a high speed, every now and then sounding, as a fish (up there called a thrasherfish) about a quarter his size seemed to be biting or tearing chunks from around his dorsal fin; but no sooner had he dived than up he came with a rush, partially turning over upon his side. During several of his uprushes we could see—we had approached quite close—a swordfish jabbing him in the belly. When the swordfish withdrew or was flung clear, we could see spurts of bright red blood.

We pursued them for nearly an hour, when suddenly the overtaxed whale succumbed with only a few spasmodic twitches. Both the thrasher and the swordfish continued their vicious onslaughts until realization of the whale's condition seemed to break upon them. Then apparently exhausted, they floated on the surface a while; but eventually reviving, began to swim around their victim, occasionally nosing him. Finally they seemed to find something particularly interesting around his mouth, which was flung wide open. I can't say for certain if it was the whale's tongue, for it seemed to me at the time to be more—something foreign in his mouth—sorta jelly like. But I distinctly remember my friend state they were devouring said whale's tongue, as once before he had seen a similar scene. As we were on a whaling trip commercially, we didn't waste any further time. The whale was so cut up he was valueless to us. On our back track we noticed a broad streak of greasy water fairly alive with millions of small fish, all taking their fill from pieces of the unlucky sperm. The streak continued for better than thirty miles before rough weather broke up all traces of it.

—HARRY IRWIN ENGLEHART

A NOTE from William Corcoran, in connection with his story, "Strictly Legal", in this issue:

New Preston, Connecticut

At one point in the course of writing "Strictly Legal" I included in the dialogue a phrase which gave me pause when I reread it. The story is placed in a day forty years departed, yet my character made use of the very modern expression "running a racket". I doubted the advisability of using this figure of speech, not because it was an anachronism, but because it might be difficult to convince people that it belonged to the background of the prairie cattle country of the '80's. It does belong, and the antiquity of the phrase can be easily proved.

I have no idea whether or not the modern location is a survival. It would be interesting to trace its history. In January of this year, F. P. A. in his column in the New York *World*, "The Conning Tower", conducted a cursory investigation which brought to light any number of recorded instances of this phrase in use through two generations. There was no conclusive proof, however, that the modern term descended from the older.

TO SUPPORT my own use of the word "racket" I shall quote from an authority I discovered long before the Conning Tower discussion. In his volume of sketches and stories of pioneer days in the plains country, "Cattle Brands", Andy Adams relates the misadventures of a cowboy called "Stubb". On page 109 the author says of him:

"If there was any one thing that he shone in, it was rustling coffin varnish during the early prohibition days along the Kansas border . . . Once, about midnight, he tried to arouse a drug clerk who slept in the store, and as he had *worked this racket* before, he coppered the play to repeat."

Andy Adams was writing of the '70's, and his book was published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1906—almost a generation before the blooming of the machine gun racketeer!

—WILLIAM CORCORAN

GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES' recent Camp-fire chat on hunting alligators in the Central American jungles evokes this interesting letter from a resident of that country:

Guatemala City, Guatemala

I have been a reader of *Adventure* from about the time of its first issue, I think, and many of its stories and articles, describing localities where I have lived and worked during thirty-two years' sojourn in Mexico, the West Indies and Central America, have held peculiar interest for me. At the moment, I beg to take issue with Mr. Rafael de Nogales regarding his statement in his letter to Camp-fire in the number of July 15th, describing the methods of capturing alligators.

While my experience has been chiefly on the West Coast, the conditions are essentially the same. I have hunted alligators for their skins and sold several thousand of them with more or less profit. The use of the double pointed hardwood peg is usual; it is called on the West Coast a *billarda* (pronounced bee-yar-da). To this stick is attached, at the middle, a length of rawhide or bale-wire, and thereto a short length of line tied to a bamboo or corkwood float, usually with some bright colored marker. A piece of very putrid meat is wrapped around the *billarda*, and a number of these, from thirty to fifty, are turned loose in an estuary and the adjacent creeks and left until the next day, when the markers are picked up and towed to some landing-place, and the alligators, more or less exhausted or half drowned, are dragged up and killed. Even then some of them put up a nasty fight.

The spectacle of a man trying to approach an alligator on land to thrust the *billarda* into place would be quite interesting. Mr. Nogales seems to forget that an alligator has a tail, and can smash a man's leg, or most of his ribs, with one blow of it; and a man trying to reach an alligator's mouth would be in exactly the position to receive the blow. I have seen river men dive into the caves in the river banks under water and poke out the animals with poles, with others ready to noose them as they emerge. But the baited *billarda* seems to work best, as we have caught over thirty in a night from one "set".

IN YOUR issue of August 1st, Mr. Edgar Young states that tapirs reach a weight of 400 pounds. I have noted also President Roosevelt's similar statement, in his book on his South American trip; also that it is inoffensive. This may be very true of some localities; I should say it was of the tapir I have seen and killed here in Guatemala. But in Spanish Honduras, to my certain knowledge, they grow much larger, and I will venture to say that there are full grown bulls that approach or pass 1200 pounds in weight. They will frequently charge the light carried by night-hunters, but when the hunter evades the rush, the tapir, or *danta* (its Spanish name) keeps right on blindly, crashing through everything. In the month of May, when the female has her young with her, she will charge at sight and turn and keep on charging, and is a very dangerous animal, striking with her forefeet armed with three knife-edged horn toes. The natives say that she will also use her tusks, but this I have not seen; the four tusks are simply short fangs, but very thick and sharp.

Regarding the estimate of weight, I have no way of giving more than a relative idea. Some years ago, while making some surveys for the United Fruit Company on the Ulua River, some fifty miles inland, a female *danta* charged my men and chased them to trees or cover, and when she came toward my transit I dropped her with a lucky shot, killing her with a second. She was not regarded as at all unusual in size, but we estimated her weight at 800. We skinned her, as I wanted the hide for several purposes, and later in the day at the railroad station of Progreso, on the Ulua River, we weighed the green hide. It lacked the head and lower leg parts, and the green hide weighed almost exactly 150 pounds; so you can figure it out.

—JOHN JEROLOMAN

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South Seas

THE price of copra offers no exception to the world-wide slump in prices.

Request:—"I am interested in migrating to either the Cook Islands or Samoa to start business or obtain employment.

Can you suggest to me whether there are any opportunities for a young man out there?"

—CHAS. BROWNE, Montreal, Canada

Reply, by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—There is just one group of islands in the Pacific to which I would suggest you turn your attention and that is the Samoan Group. But there are several points of view to consider and you can make your own conclusions. Of course, the present world depression can not go on forever. At present, copra, the chief living-making export, is not worth selling, so low is the price. If you have enterprise and courage you could take them with you as assets and get in on the ground floor while the acquisition of a plantation is cheap, owing to the slump. There are two bits of Samoa —one set of the islands belongs to the U. S. A., and the other is mandated to the New Zealand Government. If you want to gain some first hand knowledge write to the American Samoa office at Washington and ask if you can lease any land on the three islands. At the same time write to the High Commissioner, Apia, Samoa, and ask him if it is possible for you to lease one of the ex-German plantations and ask for all particulars. I am sure you will receive a very courteous reply, but I am not guaranteeing that you will get a footing easily. It just turns on whether there is a vacant section and whether you happen to have no competition for the spot that you yearn for. The Cook Group, which is much nearer New Zealand, has its possibilities too.

Please remember that life in the South Sea Islands is not all that it is cracked up to be. Just now it happens that the white man's burden is making a living.

Cayuse

EVERY cowboy is his own hostler.

Request:—"What are the duties of a cowboy with his ranch horse, the keeping and care, etc?"

—FRANK SOMMA, Brooklyn, New York

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—The cowboy must break and train his own horse in most cases, although this is not always expected of the tenderfoot. He is generally assigned a string of old horses, while the old hands take on the broncs. Very little care is given the Western cow horse, and you would soon get the hang of it.

Old Chan-Chan

TREASURE hunters have made themselves most unwelcome to the Peruvian government.

Request:—"What is your opinion about present day chances for treasure hunting at Chan-Chan, Peru? Are there many restrictions put on treasure hunters there now?"

—J. R. BRADSTOCK, Bell Rose, Long Island

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—The chances for treasure hunting at Chan-Chan, Peru, at the present time are not so hot. Formerly there was a good chance to strike something in the way of treasure, but due to the ruthless way in which *huaca* seekers opened the graves and carried away bodies or pieces of them and threw the other

parts around, the Peruvian government has shut down on treasure hunting and keep a guard there constantly. There is a big penalty for sneaking out anything of the treasure variety from the republic. Some claim to have methods to get out small souvenirs such as whistling ducks, vases, and what not, but anything of value would be held there and the finder possibly prosecuted for making the attempt to get it out.

Canada

HUDSON'S Bay Company. Clerks and factors.

Request:—"How would one go about getting a position with the Hudson's Bay Company?"

—ROBT. L. ACKLEN, Nashville, Tennessee

Reply, by Mr. S. E. Sangster:—There isn't a chance in the world of your obtaining any favorable consideration under conditions of the present time for a position with the Hudson's Bay Company.

The jobs of factors and clerks in their fur posts in the North are filled by experienced men in the first-mentioned instance, while the clerical vacancies are generally filled by young men shipped over from Great Britain.

Shotgun

THE best load for squirrels.

Request:—"Would you recommend No. 6 or No. 8 chilled shots in a 12-gage shotgun, as a squirrel load?"

—HENRY WIDEMER, Morgan City, Louisiana

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—I prefer No. 6 chilled for squirrel load in 12-gage shotgun loads, because there are not so many pellets as with No. 8; and also at long distances there is great shocking power.

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They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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